


2-20-1969

Interview no. 39

Ira Joralemon

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Interview with Ira Joralemon by Leon C. Metz, 1969, "Interview no. 39," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Ira Joralemon
INTERVIEWER: Leon C. Metz
PROJECT: _____
DATE OF INTERVIEW: February 20, 1969
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted
TAPE NO.: _____
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 39
TRANSCRIBER: _____
DATE TRANSCRIBED: _____

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Author of Romantic Copper and geologist for the New Cornelia Mine.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Career and personality of Col. Bill Greene in the Southwest.

16 pages.

Ira Joralemon
By Leon Metz in
Berkeley, California
February 20, 1969

M: When did you first go to México?

J: In 1907. I went to Bisbee when I came out of college and lived there for 15 years. Bisbee is only nine miles from the Mexican border. I was a geologist, and after a couple of years I was sent to make examinations all over the Southwest. Many of them were in Sonora, and my first business trip was to Cananea in 1909. I was then working for the Calumet and Arizona Mining Company. They had a very successful mining property in Bisbee. It was established by Michigan people, so it was Calumet and Arizona. When I went there, they had three or four good mines in the Bisbee district. I was soon put in charge of exploration, and a few years afterward we developed the big New Cornelia Mine in Ajo, out in western Arizona. There were copper mines. The Bisbee property and the Ajo property were taken over by Phelps Dodge in 1931. They are two of the three big properties of the Phelps Dodge Corporation. So the Calumet and Arizona lost its identity and was mixed in with Phelps Dodge. I had left the company then. I left the company in 1922 to come up here and go into consulting work. I was assistant general manager when I left.

M: When did you first meet Colonel Greene?

J: In either 1909 or 1910. Colonel Greene had been eased out as head of the Cananea property. He wasn't an operator. He had wonderful imagination and had started a lot of the very good industrial things as well as the Cananea mines, but he couldn't operate and lost money steadily. He raised money by selling stock, but finally he reached the end and the predecessor of the Anaconda Company took over the property--bought him out. He had to

accept an offer that they made him, which gave him enough so that he didn't need much sympathy.

M: Do you know any of the inside happenings of this?

J: It's all in Romantic Copper. I looked all that up. I knew most of the principals. [I] had met them in connection with my work for the copper company.

M: Who were some of them?

J: Well, the most interesting one of them was Lawson, a fantastic character who worked largely in the stock market. They weren't as particular then--there wasn't any Security and Exchange Commission--but he worked in the market and started some companies in Butte, Montana, and was trying to get hold of companies in Arizona. Among other things, he wanted to get Cananea, an extremely rich district which Colonel Greene had got hold of through the widow of Colonel Pesqueira, one of the very amusing characters in the early days of Sonora. Romantic Copper tells the whole story, how Colonel Greene had the most unbelievable time for 45 years. He had been an unsuccessful gambler, drunk, miner, cowpuncher and everything else, and he developed the idea that he was good for something better than that. Copper was then much in the public eye due to Butte and some of the Arizona camps, so he said he was going to get himself a copper mine.

He was then living in Charleston, which is just a few miles from Tombstone. He would go up to Tombstone and work for a little while and then put the money in the ranch he had on the San Pedro River in Charleston. But that barely kept him alive and he wanted something better. But he had a few cattle, and the cattle would drift across the border into México--there was no line fence

then--and Greene would follow them there. He followed them down one time further than usual to Cananea, which was 40 miles south of the border. He had seen enough of mining to know that iron stained mountains were often associated with copper, and the iron staining in Cananea was spectacular, the most spectacular iron stains showing anywhere in the world. So he decided that he wanted to get hold of Cananea. And Pesqueira, who had been in charge of the Mexican army contingent in that part of México under Porfirio Díaz (who was then President), had built a little smelter and got his soldiers and others to mine the rich ore. He smelted and hauled the copper down to Guaymas and shipped it to Swansea, Wales, and made a little money by it. Then he died, and his widow, who was then a nice Mexican woman of 50, had the property and didn't know what to do it. Colonel Greene found this out and went to call on the widow. He spoke good Spanish, and in addition had a very pleasing personality. I think he was a most personable man and impressed anyone as being unusual; and he impressed Señora Pesqueira a great deal. They became good friends, and he got her to give him an option on the property.

M: Were they more than friends?

J: No, no. I've never heard it suggested that there was more than that. Neither one of them were young then. Colonel Greene was then about 50 and she must have been at least 50. He brought some of his friends there to help run the property. Jim Kirk was the foreman from Tombstone, and a very good miner, so he brought Kirk down to run the mine. Ed Massey was more of a salesman than a miner, but good at getting along with people. The three of them took over properties in Cananea and started to mine a little ore. There was some very rich ore near the surface, and they got enough money so Colonel Greene

could carry out his ambition and go to New York to sell stock and finance the large amount of money that would be necessary to bring these properties to real production. There he ran into Lawson and they had some of the most amusing experiences that ever happened. They were alternately dear friends /or they would fight. They would call each other terrible names. They would try to get the best of /each other, and one time (this is in the book) Lawson had succeeded in cancelling a contract that he had made with Greene by which Greene would have got a bigger interest in the company. Greene came back from Cananea to New York. Lawson was then in Boston, and Greene said he was going to shoot Lawson on sight. Lawson said he would welcome him-- would be glad to do it. They threatened each other. So Greene got a lot of reporters and hitched /up his beautiful private /railroad car, and all the reporters went up to Boston with him /to see him attack Lawson. All of them went to where Lawson was staying and thought they were going to have a shooting match right away. Greene went in the office blustering, and Lawson got up, and they stood there and looked at each other for two or three minutes not saying anything. Finally Greene smiled and said, "Hell, let's have a drink!" And Lawson said, "It's on me!" So they went and had a drink and adjusted all their troubles right away. This, I think, is absolutely straight. I got it from people who knew them both well.

M: Did you ever see Greene's private car?

J: That's where I got acquainted with him. In 1909, after he had been eased out of the presidency of the Cananea Company, he still had the big ranches. He had the three most beautiful cattle ranches in the world, I think. They were adjoining. The Turkey Track ranch in Sonora was a principality which extended for as much as fifty miles south of the border. /It was an

enormous ranch of ideal grazing land; couldn't have been better. In the northwestern part of this, near the station of Santa Cruz on the railroad that went from Nogales to Cananea (which was then the Southern Pacific of México), Colonel Greene had got control of a copper prospect that he was very enthusiastic about. While he was out of Cananea, he wanted to get back into the copper business, so he went up to see the general manager of the company I was working for--Calumet and Arizona--and induced him to have an examination made. So the manager sent me down--I was doing examining then--to make this examination. Colonel Greene was going out to inspect that part of his ranch and went out in the Verde, his beautiful car, and took me along. So I spent three or four days in the Verde with Colonel Greene. In the daytime I would go out and look at this mine and take some samples, and he would ride over his ranch, In the evening the Mexican ranch foremen would come in to talk with him and it was most interesting to see the deep respect and affection that they had for Colonel Greene. They all called him "Meester Greene--they never called him Colonel at all--and thought he was wonderful. And he knew exactly how to treat them and he liked them. It wasn't any pretense or anything bad in it; he just liked them. And so they appreciated that and would have done anything for him. And so every evening after I came in from looking at the mines he would have them in the Verde and would keep them for dinner, which would be something they had never seen. They had been used to living on beans and tortillas and a little dried meat. And he had a very good colored cook on the Verde and would give them a meal that they'd never heard of before. When it was built it was the best private car that had ever been built. He had it furnished for him, and for that time it was just a magnificent and luxurious car.

M: Could you tell about what it was like on the inside?

J: Well, the rear of the car had a small observation compartment with an observation platform in the back that would seat perhaps 10 or 15 people, armchairs on both sides. Then there was a corridor, and on one side it opened into four or five sleeping compartments--very well furnished, very nice. In front of that was the dining car, in which there was a long table. He could easily have 12 or more for dinner there. As I remember, it was very nicely furnished with a long brown mahogany table, nice furniture and arm chairs to sit in. And he had two colored servants, a cook, and one who served as waiter and made up the rooms. I can't remember exactly what that looked like because of other private cars, but at that time it was the best thing that had ever been built. It was a beautiful car.

M: Is it still in existence? Does anyone still have it?

J: It has been rebuilt. Some time after Colonel Greene had died, it was bought by Dr. Ricketts and John Greenway, who were two of the leading mining men. John Greenway was manager of the company I worked for, Calumet and Arizona, and Ricketts was first one of the top consultants and then manager at Cananea. He was put in by Anaconda when they took it away from Colonel Greene, and operated it very successfully, and then he was president of Inspiration Copper Company in Arizona. So he was a very eminent mining man and probably the most intellectual of all the mining men. He was a Ph. D. from Princeton, in geology, and was extremely good. He became responsible for quite a number of properties with extremely difficult problems in metallurgy and mining, and was so good and would investigate everything so thoroughly that every one of them went perfectly from the day it opened.

The New Cornelia property at Ajo that we took up had a type of ore that never had been treated successfully before, and the greatest engineers in the country said it couldn't be done. But Greenway and Ricketts thought it could be done. Ricketts was then consulting engineer for the company and Greenway the manager. They built a pilot plant and spent nearly two years in test work, first in the laboratory, then a 10-ton a day plant, then a 40-ton a day plant. Then they built the big plant--big then--5,000 tons a day. And with this new process that no one thought could possibly work, the mill equalled the production and the recovery and the costs in the first month of operation--a thing that had never been done before, and I don't think it has been equaled since.

Dr. Ricketts was a very wonderful person. He became a very good friend of mine and I did a lot of work for him and knew him well. I had a very deep respect for him.

M: Greene had a locomotive to pull this car?

J: Oh, yes. It was Southern Pacific of México. When he wanted to go, they'd have a special locomotive and a little coach for the crew to be in, and then the Verde at the end. Verde means green in Spanish, so he named it for himself. They took him around, and when he went to New York, they hitched the Verde on one of the good trains going to New York. So for about the 10 years that his greatness lasted, he traveled everywhere in the Verde.

M: Did he invite in just the foremen, or did he invite the vaqueros?

J: A few of them would come in. They all just worshiped him--thought he was wonderful. But there were too many of them, he couldn't ask them in. So if there was any reason--if he asked one of them to tell about cattle in

one particular area, he'd ask him in. But it was principally the foremen.

M: How about his colored cooks?

J: Oh, they thought he was wonderful! They were fine. Very good cooks. Yes, everybody thought the world of him. He knew how to get on with people and was genuine. It wasn't put on at all. He did like people. It was genuine. He was a very remarkable person, for one as flamboyant as he was, because he was an extremely flamboyant person in everything he did. He spent a lot of money and always wanted to live better than anyone had done before--on a higher scale. But in spite of that he was very quiet. He always spoke in a very gentle voice. And friendly. He was an exceedingly nice person. Everybody liked him. That was one of his troubles. He liked people so much that he couldn't pick good ones to run his operations. He would pick people he liked, not people who were able. And once he picked them, he was so loyal to them that he never would fire them.

M: Can you think of any examples that are not in your book?

J: I put most of it in the book. He had Keith starting at 45 or 48 years old. In the 10 years that followed, he conceived and brought within sight of success four of the greatest operations in the history of the Southwest: Cananea was the first, and because of the fact that he couldn't run it properly, that lost money. And when Anaconda took it over, the predecessor of Anaconda, they made it one of the great mines that has paid hundreds of millions of dollars in dividends and they are now increasing the production to ten or fifteen thousand tons a day of very low grade ore, and it will go for another 40 or 50 years. It's one of the great copper mines. Dr. Ricketts built it up and made it a great mine.

M: How big a man was Greene? What did he look like?

J: He was rather tall--I'd say he was five feet ten or eleven; fairly heavy set, with a ruddy face--he'd been out in the sun so much, the Southwestern sun--a very ruddy face, and a beautiful brown handlebar mustache, which was always very well kept. Gray hair and handlebar mustache.

M: Did he have all of his hair?

J: He had quite a lot of hair, yes. A lot of gray hair and this beautiful mustache. And as I remember, he had pleasant blue eyes. A very engaging person. You could tell that he believed in himself. He wasn't trying to cheat people, but he really believed in himself. And did a wonderful job. And for a man with his background, with no education at all, and till forty-five just a more or less worthless cowpuncher, and miner, finally got a few cattle and ran a small cattle ranch. Then to conceive these four things; Cananea the first one. Then they needed timber there and he knew that there was a lot of timber in the Sierra Madre on the line between Chihuahua and Sonora, and so he got together a big area there--called it the Sierra Madre Land and Timber Company--and built the railroad. Are you familiar with that country--Chihuahua?

M: Yes, sir.

J: Well, you know the western line of the railroad that goes down to Creel and then back to Chihuahua City--the one that goes pretty nearly west for a while, then turns south right along the edge of the Sierra Madre down to Creel and then comes back again to Chihuahua City? He built that railroad. He started to build it but then ran out of money and got some railroad people to finish it. So he didn't control the railroad. And that went through his timber. And he built a lot of sawmills. And since then it has

been very successful. But he didn't know how to run it--didn't get the right people so he lost a lot of money on that.

M: Were these people from the States, or did he hire Mexican people?

J: A great many of them were his old friends in the States.

M: Did they deliberately take advantage of him?

J: They weren't equipped to handle it. They were his old friends. They had no industrial experience and they didn't know how to do it. I don't think they took advantage of him. I knew Jim Kirk, who was the mining man. He was a typical old time Arizona miner and mine foreman. Fine person.

M: What did Jim look like?

J: Jim was medium height and rather thin with scanty gray hair--had quite a large nose and thin face and very rugged complexion; was a very good mine foreman but didn't have the ability to run a mine. So when Dr. Ricketts took over, he knew he had to have someone who could put in new methods of mining and cut the mining costs, so he took away the mine foreman of one of our mines in Bisbee, one of the Calumet and Arizona properties in Bisbee, a man named Mitchell who was an extremely good miner and had a pretty good education. He cut the mining costs way down at Cananea and made it possible for them to make money.

M: What did Mitchell look like?

J: He looked like a scholar. He was tall and thin, had a little mustache, was very, very quiet; looked like a professor, really. He didn't look like a mine boss at all. He had been a very good mine forman for us in Bisbee and an extremely good miner in Cananea. He devised a new method of mining in heavy ground that was so successful it is still used in many mines. It was called the Mitchell slice. He cut slices across the ore and then mined

the ore between these slices. So Mitchell was an extremely good miner.

M: Did Colonel Greene have much sense of humor?

J: Very little. I don't remember his laughing at all. He was rather serious. He was very friendly and nice. I couldn't encourage him about his mine near Santa Cruz. I had to turn it down. It never has made anything since then, so I was right. In spite of that he was just as friendly--he knew what I thought of it--just as friendly as could be. Very nice person.

M: Did he have any religious principles?

J: I don't think he had a sign of any. Never heard that he did.

M: Was he an agnostic or an Atheist?

J: I don't think he ever paid any--would not speak of. I don't think he ever belonged to any church. Of course he had lived away out in the woods. There wasn't much chance to pick up any religious experience. I never heard it suggested, whether he had ever gone to church.

M: Did he swear much?

J: No, his language was--well, he talked very little. Said very little in any way, and what he did say was said very quietly. I can't remember his swearing.

M: Was he well read? Was he scholarly? Could he read?

J: Oh, yes. He had some education, not much. But he was an adventurer, so he came West and wandered around till he got these four big ideas--first was Cananea; then the timber in Chihuahua; and then he had the idea of getting all the old silver mines that had produced a lot of silver under the Spanish regime a couple of hundred years earlier and putting them together in one big company. And he didn't have anyone to run it, so that lost money very quickly--that went bump very quickly. And then he got the idea of going back into the area around Casa Grande where there were the remains of the

irrigation ditches that some earlier Indians had had hundreds of years ago, all overgrown, gone to pieces. All that was left was the Big House--the Casa Grande--which was falling to pieces. You could barely trace the irrigation ditches. And Greene got the idea of putting in an earth dam across the Gila, irrigating that area around Casa Grande in the Gila Valley that is now one of the richest parts of the Salt River Valley. So he sold stock and raised money on that, and brought it within sight of success. Of course now it's worth thousands of dollars an acre, some of the best land in Arizona. But just as it got ready to make money, a flood came along and took out his dam and it went flooey. Everything went except for the ranch.

These three ranches that he held were so good that he couldn't spoil them. The home ranch was the one near Hereford in Arizona. That took in all the land from the Mexican border north to about Benson, about 40 miles north. And then on the other side of the Huachuca Mountains, on the American side, was the San Rafael Ranch, the most beautiful ranch in the world. I've ridden across it. It's rolling hills with oak trees and the higher hills have brush that is good for browse in the dry seasons when there isn't grass. It's an ideal ranch. And Greene made that his ranch for raising blooded Hereford bulls. A wonderful ranch. And for a long time he sold the best Hereford cattle that were anywhere. South of the border was the big Turkey Track ranch, as I say a principality. At one time I think there were forty to sixty thousand cattle.

M: What did the ranch house look like, the ranch at Hereford?

J: It wasn't big. I've been there. It wasn't a big ranch. He didn't spend much time there, he spent his time in Cananea. He had a beautiful house in Cananea, Mexican style house. But the house in Hereford was a two-story

house with, oh, not over six or seven rooms. It wasn't a big house, but a nice-looking house. Hereford was in Arizona about 25 miles west of Bisbee. It's on the San Pedro river just east of the beautiful Huachuca Mountains. It was a frame house as I remember.

M: What did you mean by a principality?

J: Well, so beautiful and so rich. This great area--hundreds of square miles of rolling country, beautiful grassy country--the little mountains in between covered with...are you familiar with cattle ranching?

M: Somewhat, yes.

J: Browse. It had ideal browse so that in the driest year the cattle could always get through. And the Sonora River, the San Pedro River, and the Santa Cruz River all three of them headed in the center of that ranch, near the Cananea Mountains. You had the three rivers going out in three directions, and always ample water. And so it was a perfectly wonderful idea for a ranch. It was so good that he couldn't spoil it. He had a stepson, whose name I can't remember, who turned out to be a very good ranch manager, and he ran the ranch. In later years, when Bill Greene or his sons threatened to become busted, a year or two of income from the ranch would put them on their feet again.

M: You mentioned another house in Cananea.

J: Yes. I never was in that house, but it was on a little hill, nice-looking, with a view of the Cananea Mountains and across to San José Mountain, which is on the border near Naco, and a rather large wandering, Spanish-type house--adobe house, well shaded with cottonwood trees. Very attractive place. A little lawn around it.

M: How large was it?

J: It was only one story but it looked as though it was 75 or a hundred feet long with quite a number of rooms. As I say, I just went in. When I went with him, I went to the house before we went to the Verde and was in the main room, and I can't remember what that was like.

M: Did he spend much money?

J: Yes, he spent money. He was a great gambler, for one thing, most of his life, until he got into the copper business. When he got a few dollars, he'd play the wheel and gamble it away.

M: He didn't do much poker playing?

J: Either roulette or blackjack. I think blackjack was the big game at Tombstone in the early days.

M: How about his family?

J: I don't think I ever met his wife. I met his sons. After this book was published, they said if I ever came down there they would shoot me, because I hadn't made the old man a tin god all his life. They were very angry.

M: How do you account for the fact that you never met Mrs. Greene?

J: Well, I saw him just when he came to Bisbee on business. And on this one trip when I went down there, I was in the car all the time. I may have met her casually. I don't remember; don't think I did even that.

M: Would you call him a good family man?

J: He was exceedingly fond of his children. He had as I remember two sons and a daughter, and when the daughter was a little girl he built a small dam across the San Pedro to irrigate some of his ground with and a sudden flood came along and took out the dam. And his daughter, who was a small girl, perhaps eight or 10, was playing down the stream and she was drowned. He

was terribly upset by that. He blamed the neighbor downstream from him who had said that he wouldn't stand for Greene taking the water--he wanted the water--and he thought the neighbor had dynamited the dam. He hadn't. And he went up to Tombstone and shot this neighbor. It's in the book. I tried to get all the facts I could, and I think it's absolutely authentic. But he really did think so. They'd been fighting for a long time, had threatened to kill each other several times. So when he went up to Tombstone immediately after the little girl had been killed, he looked up the man--I can't remember his name but it's in the book--and shot him. They had a trial right away, and since they'd been threatening each other, for a long time, they turned him loose.

M: Did Colonel Greene chase women?

J: I don't think so. I never heard that he did. The big scandal was shooting this man. And that upset that part of the country a great deal, because both of them had friends and they didn't think it was necessary. And it was due to the fact that he worshiped this little girl. He was just half crazy after she had been drowned, and he blamed the neighbor for it.

M: Do you remember the sons?

J: I just remember that the older one was about the same build as his father-- pretty fairly tall and rather heavy set. Rather pleasant looking.

M: Could they do the things their father did?

J: No, they didn't have the imagination. The remarkable thing about Colonel Greene was the imagination that let him, with all his lack of training, think out enterprises and bring them to within sight of success. But he couldn't make any of them go except the ranch, which he couldn't spoil. And as far as I know, they didn't have any of that at all. I haven't heard of them for

a number of years, but for a long time they took an active part in running the ranches, and particularly the Turkey Track. Although the stepson--I think it was a stepson--ran the home ranch, San Rafael Ranch. They spent most of their time in Cananea and ran the Turkey Track.

M: Was the stepson a son of his wife by a former marriage?

J: I think it was. He had a different name, and I can't remember what the name was.

M: Did you ever meet the stepson? What kind of fellow was he?

J: He was a good cattleman. He was thin, sandy-haired, rather thin faced, thin in every way, quiet. I didn't know him well--knew him casually--don't remember how I happened to meet him, but I know I had met him. I used to go all over that part of the country, so I met everybody in that part of the country. He was a nice fellow. Everybody liked him, and he was a very good cattleman.

M: He didn't care about mining?

J: Didn't pay any attention to it. He was just a cattleman. That was his whole interest.

M: Is he still living?

J: I have no idea. Oh, couldn't be. He was much older than the sons. I'm pretty sure that he died a long time ago. I remember hearing that he had.