

A. L. Flagg's Southwest: A Photographic Essay

Keith Halsey & H. Mason Coggin*

A. L. Flagg (1883-1961), photographer, geologist, and engineer, took more than 3,000 photographs during his varied career in the American West and Mexico. Because the collection was in the hands of friends and family and in government reports and publications, Flagg's photographic talents have been hidden from the general public. Recently, however, the collection of negatives was donated to the Arizona Department of Mines and Mineral Resources by the Arizona Mineral and Mining Museum Foundation. Keith Halsey and H. Mason Coggin have organized the photographs and a sample of them is displayed here.

Born Arthur Leonard in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, Flagg spent his early youth around his father's jewelry and watch repair shop. His interest in minerals was peaked by a mineral-collecting customer. From this introduction, he went on to study geology at Brown University in 1906. At Brown he developed an interest in Arizona's mineral geology as well as photography and on graduation took a position as an assayer and surveyor for the Esmeralda Mine in Yavapai County. Over the course of the next few decades, Flagg would collect more than 6,000 mineral specimens and, in time, earned a national reputation as a mineralogist.

Flagg soon moved up the ranks in the minerals industry, serving as the mine examiner of the state of Durango, Mexico from 1908 to 1914. This experience gave him an opportunity to familiarize himself with mining properties and the culture of Mexico. During the Mexican Revolution, he noted that pockets

of peaceful productivity were threatened by intimidating gun-toting militarists.

The same year the revolution broke out, he married Mary Harkness White of Rhode Island and they returned to Durango where Mary shared in his professional travels. Several photographs capture her riding mule back in rural Mexico. The Flaggs enjoyed a fifty-year marriage that produced three children. Despite his itinerant schedule, Flagg remained a devoted husband and father and many of his photographs document his rich family life.

Mexico of 1912 was a nation torn by an internal revolution. Because of the unpopularity of "gringos" at this time, the Flagg family left Mexico and returned to Arizona where A. L. established a consulting business in Phoenix. As a consultant, he worked for the Kelvin-Sultana Copper Company, the Ace Mineral and Development Company, the Gallagher Vanadium and Rare Mineral Corporation, the Hope Mining Company, and the Mines Holding Company.

He joined the Arizona Department of Mines and Mineral Resources in 1946 when he became the superintendent of the Mineral Department of the Arizona State Fair. In 1953, he retired and became the first curator of the Arizona Mining and Mineral Museum. While in this latter position, Flagg was dubbed "Mr. Rock Hound." Don Dederer, the noted Arizona writer who nicknamed Flagg, also described the nationally known curator as "courtly but friendly, a true gentleman."

Flagg took special interest in teaching children about the economic importance of minerals and encouraged them to collect them as a hobby. He gave hard-to-find minerals to junior collectors searching for new specimens for their collections. One young collector recalled how it worked: "Get something like a cigar box and then pickup some rocks and put them in a box. Then take them to Mr. Flagg to find out what they are." Many of Flagg's young collectors went on to careers in the minerals industry of the American West and elsewhere.

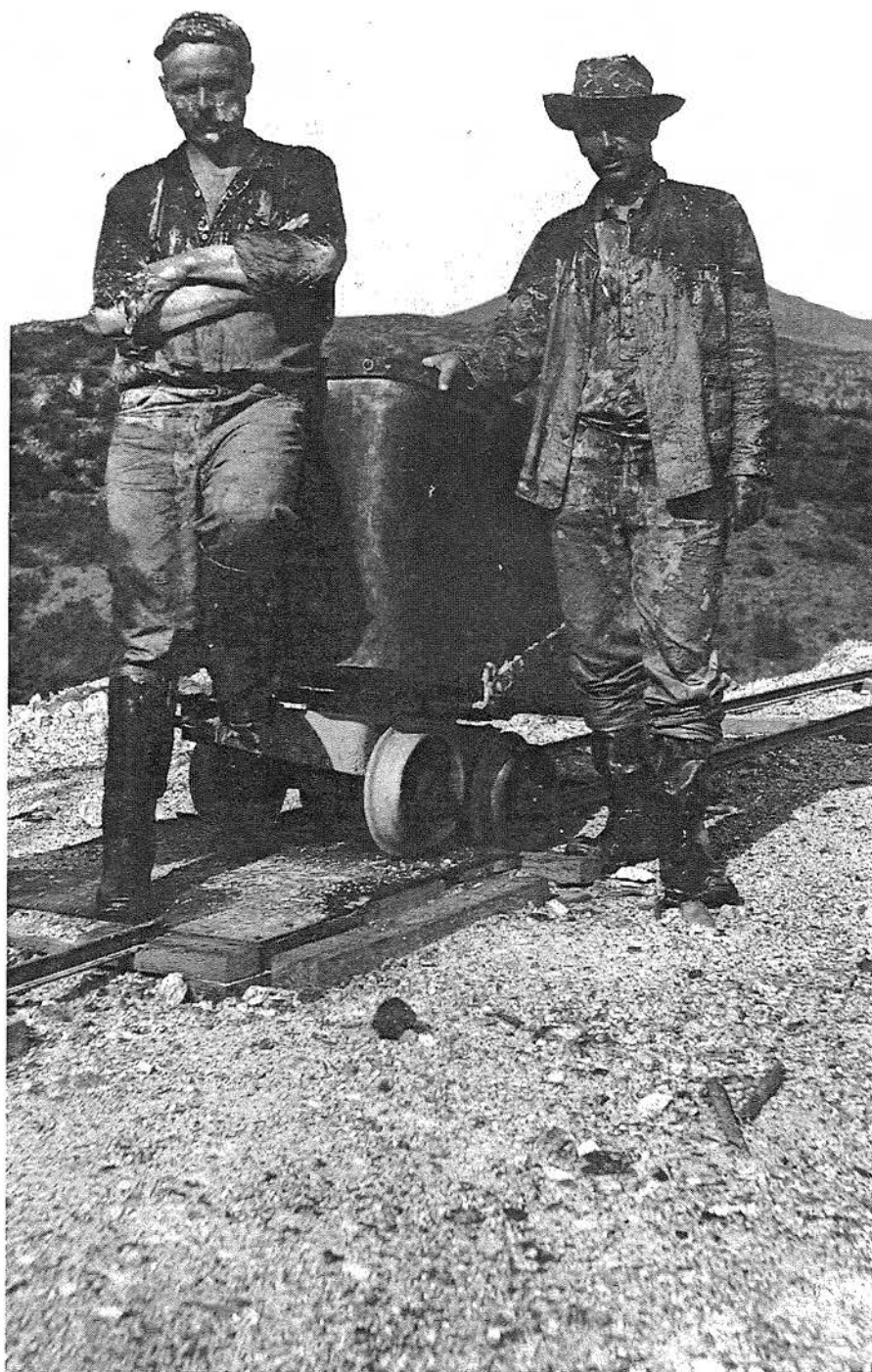
Flagg could identify most minerals on first glance. He visited many Arizona mineral sites and mines over

* H. Mason Coggin, Director of the Arizona Department of Mines and Mineral Resources, has 35 years experience in Arizona's mining industry. History, especially Arizona mining history, has been a lifelong interest of Mr. Coggin.

Keith Halsey has 35 years experience in the transportation and utilities industries across the United States. He spent several months cataloging the A. L. Flagg photographic collection.

the years and was rarely stumped when a specimen was placed before him for identification. Flagg's special skill was renowned. Prospectors, geologists, mining engineers, and even mineralogists often sought out "Mr. Rock Hound" for the last word on ore and mineral samples.

During his career, Flagg published two books, *Rockhounds* (1944) and *Arizona Mineral and Mineralogical Journeys in Arizona* (1958). He also authored numerous articles in *Arizona Highways* and several trade journals, and regularly attended state and national mining association and gem and mineralogical society conferences.



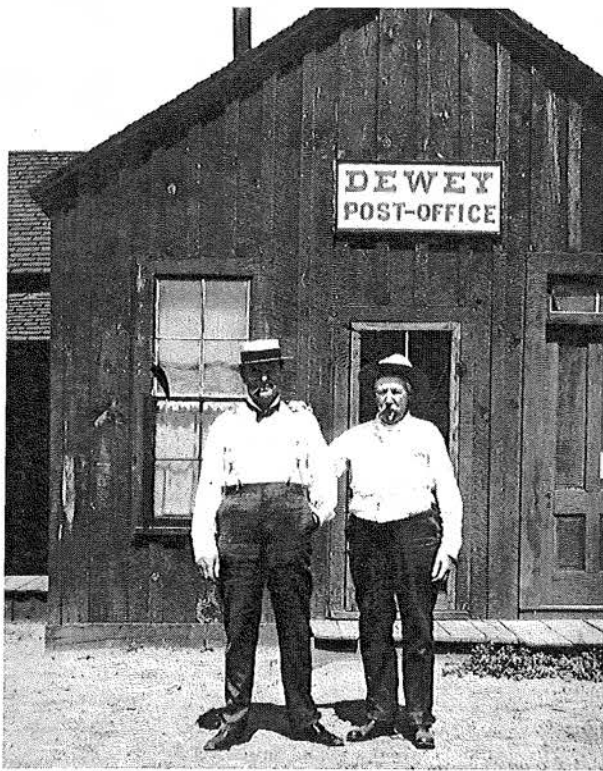
"Bant and Flagg at Esmeralda Camp" near present-day Dewey, Arizona ca. 1907 (the Flagg in the photo is not A. L.). The caked mud on these two miners probably comes from mucking the sump, a very dirty job.



"Flagg's Tent at Esmeralda," near present-day Cherry, Arizona ca. 1907 shows the rustic frontier conditions that Flagg lived under when he first came to Arizona after graduating from Brown University. It is estimated that half of Arizona's population lived in similar structures during this period.



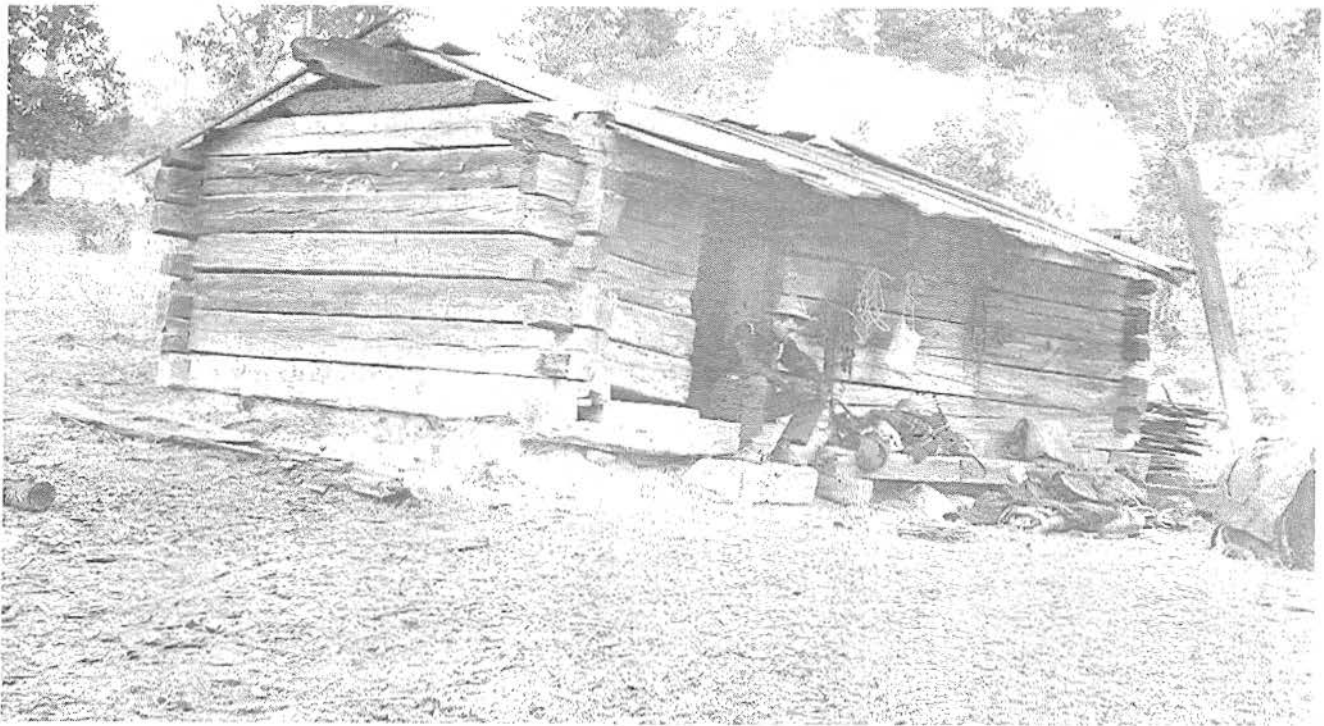
Capital from Washington Street," Phoenix, Arizona ca. 1907 captures an impressive structure at the end of a dirt road to illustrate the contrasting life styles as Arizona prepared for statehood.



"Captain Green and Mr. Robertson," Dewey, Arizona ca. 1907. Flagg found these two impressive gentlemen in front of the Dewey Post Office capturing clothing and structural details of the frontier.



"Gray's Children on Burro," near present-day Humbolt, Arizona ca. 1907 exhibits a popular mode of transportation on the frontier for both young and old. Most families in the outlying areas used dogs to ferret out rattlesnakes and other varmints.

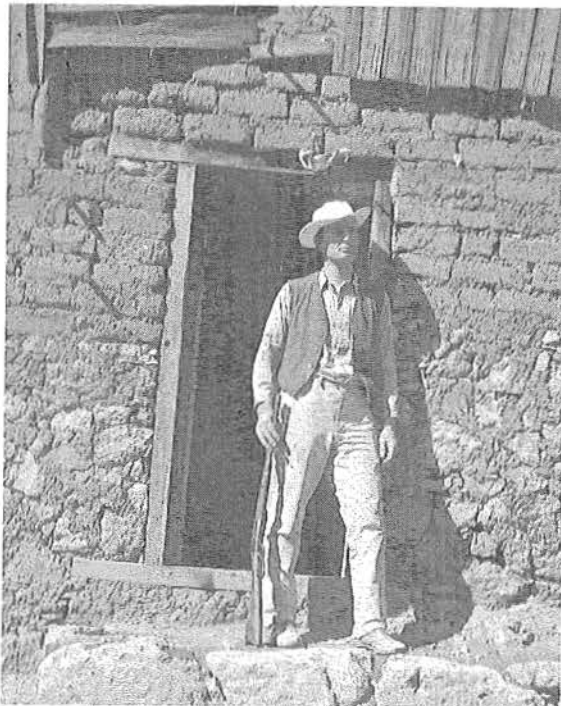


"Cabin," Huerfano County, Colorado ca. 1907 illustrates the heavy dependence on local materials for construction of the creature comforts.



"Inside the Cabin," Huerfano County, Colorado ca. shows the simple lifestyle of frontier living. Richard Flagg, A.L.'s second son, still has some of the volumes shown in this photograph.

"Log Store," Huerfano County, Colorado ca. 1907. The Huerfano Gold and Copper Mining Company developed prospects near Ojo in the Sierra Blanca District. Apparently Flagg was assisting mine management in reviewing the operations.



"C.A. Dueber Defending Home," Durango, Mexico ca. 1908. Flagg served as a mine examiner in the state of Durango from 1908 to 1914. In a country torn by political conflict, there were pockets of peaceful productivity overshadowed by gun-toting militarism.



"Bachelor Quarters in Mexico," Durango, Mexico ca. 1910. Mexico of 1910 was torn by revolution, and "gringos" became increasingly unpopular. Note the pistol on the wall showing clearly that weapons were part of everyday life at the time.



"Julio Rodriques Operating Planilla," Durango, Mexico ca. 1910. This gold miner is operating a primitive type of gold sluice on an isolated placer property.



"Serpio Nuez on Bridge," Durango, Mexico ca. 1910. The "Irish Buggy" has been a popular mode of transport since the invention of the wheel, and is still used in some regions of the world such as Costa Rica, Central America.



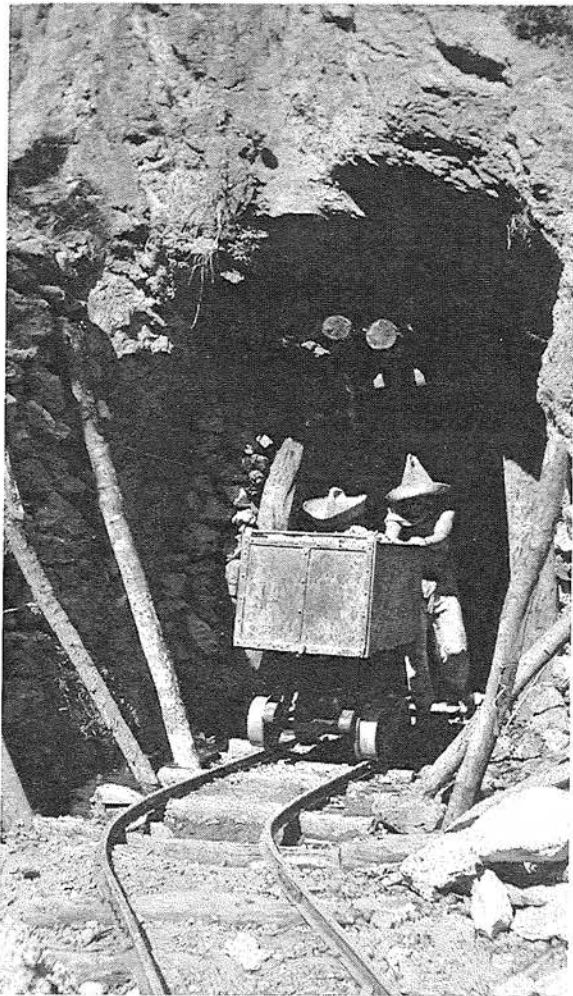
"Casa de Nova," Durango, Mexico ca. 1910. Necessity was the architect of this structure which was probably thrown together by a Mexican prospector.



"Steam Engine," Durango, Mexico ca. 1910 captures the beginning of the mechanization of farming.



"Desgranando la Chinacates," Durango, Mexico ca. 1910. Note the corn cobs. As the corn was stripped from the dry husks the cobs were used for fuel in this mechanical adaptation to agriculture.



"Jesus María Adit," Durango, Mexico ca. 1910 shows two miners moving an ore car to the surface. The mine was five days by burro from the nearest rail connection.

"Mules Carrying Pulley Parts," Durango, Mexico ca. 1910. The method of conveying a large pulley for an aerial tramway or perhaps a sophisticated mill to a remote mine site gives reason to contemplate what would power this large equipment.





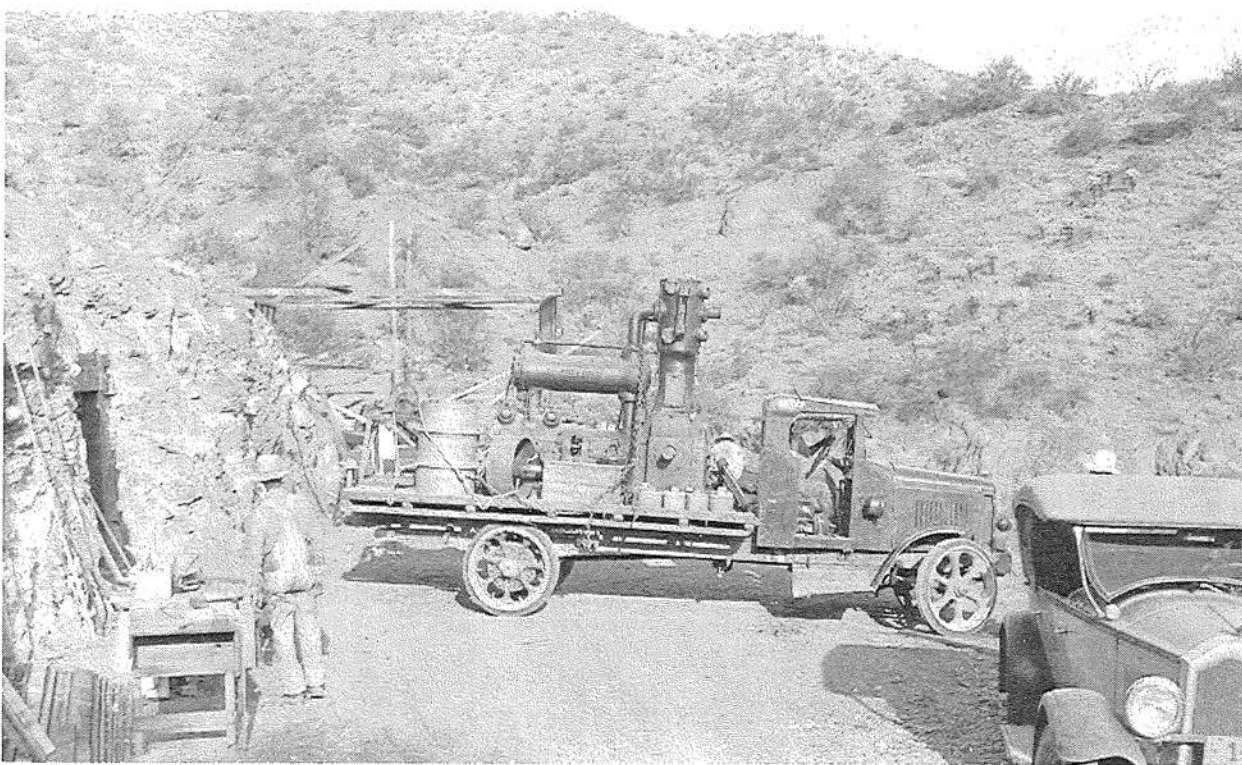
"M.H.W.F. Near Gerrame," Durango, Mexico ca. 1910. Flagg married Mary Harkness White of Rhode Island in 1910 and returned with her to Mexico. Mary, a city girl and not accustomed to the rugged ways of the frontier, was treated to a five-day ride from the end of the rail to the Jesus María Mine. The adventure was apparently wearing thin when this picture was taken.



"Richard Flagg 'Riding the Skip,'" Bradshaw Mountains, Arizona ca. 1927. The Flaggs survived their ventures on the frontier and remained married for fifty years, producing two sons and a daughter in the process. Their second son, Richard, is shown here assisting his father who is examining a mine.

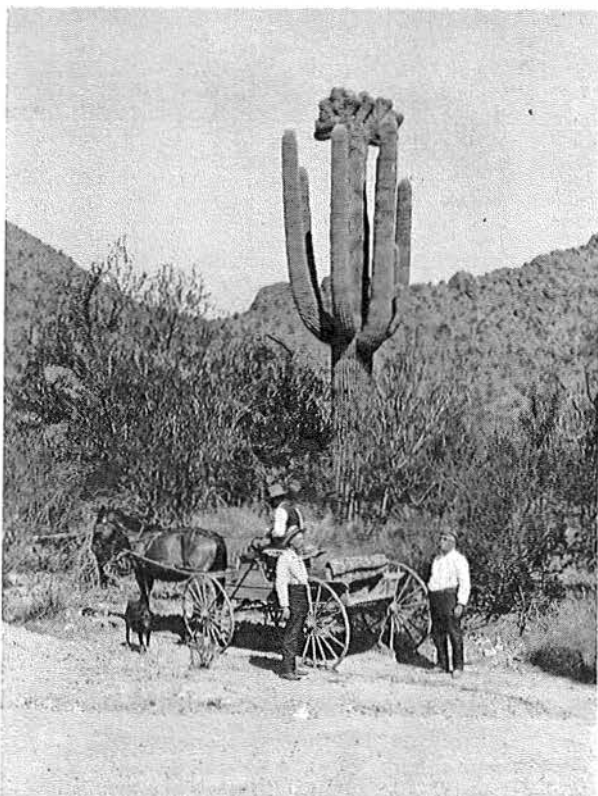
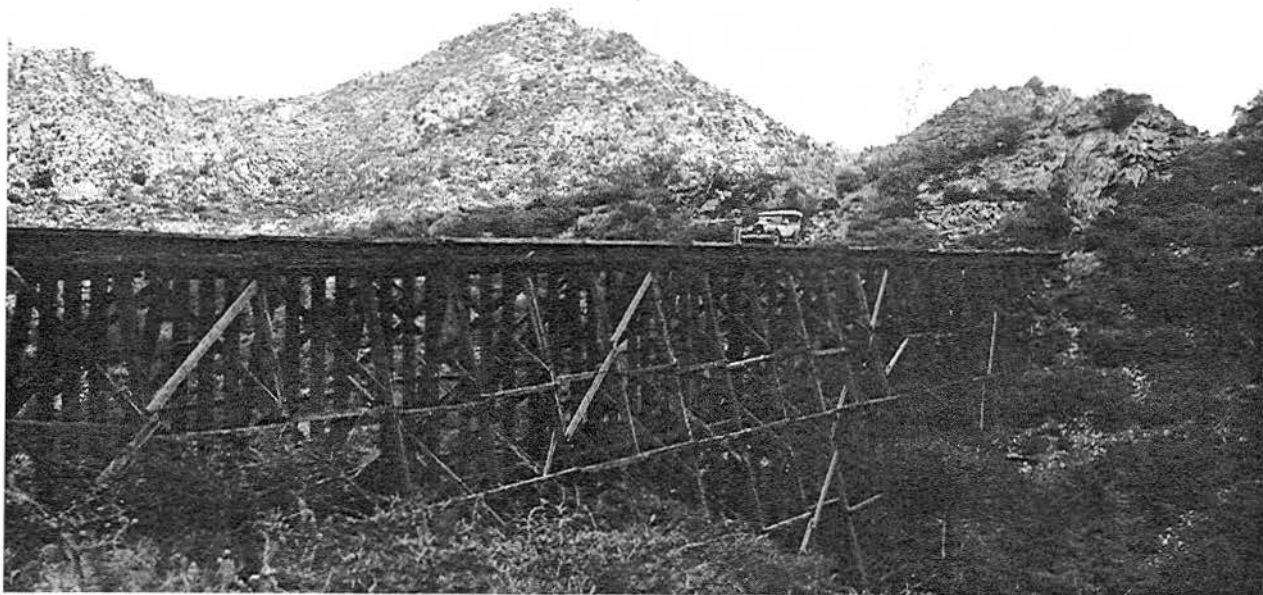


"Dentist's Office," McCall, Idaho ca. 1927 demonstrates Flagg's sympathy for a fellow traveler. The roll-up sign shows the migratory nature of many professionals. This image was captured on one of Flagg's consulting trips to the Pacific Northwest.



"Sullivan Compressor at Hope Mining Company Property," southeast of Christmas, Arizona ca. 1930. The compressor, a major labor-saving device at the mine, was highly celebrated when it arrived at the camp.

"Black Warrior Trestle on Bradshaw Mountain Railroad," ca. 1930 was taken during an examination of the mines in Tiger, Peck, and Pine Grove mining districts.



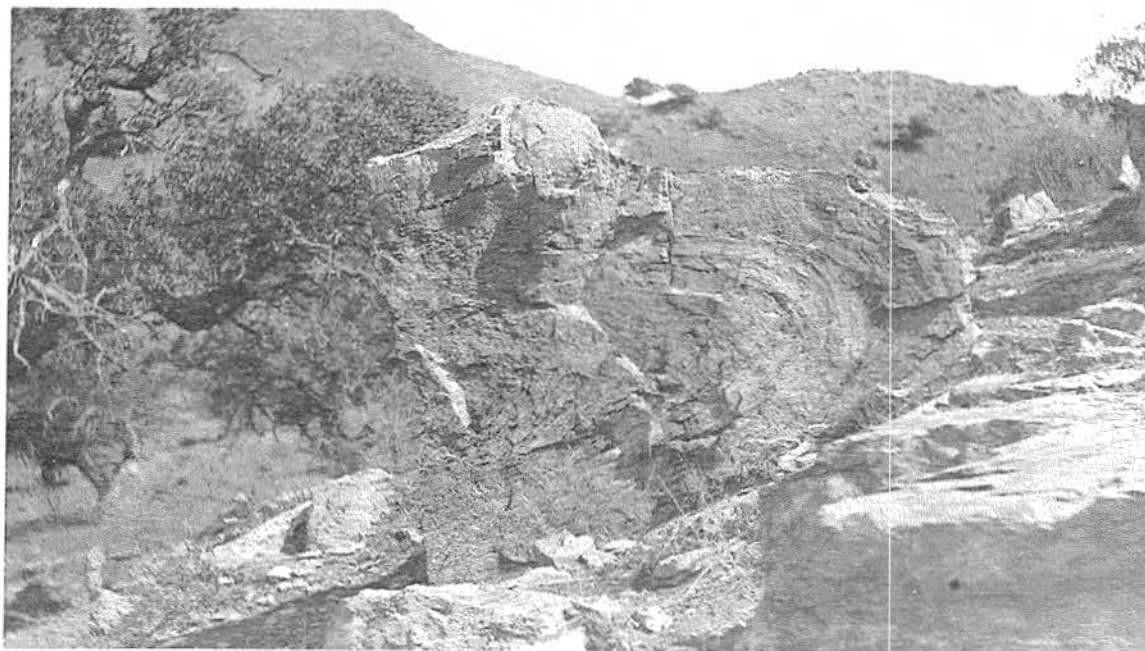
"Giant Cactus," Section, Arizona ca. 1912. The crested saguaro was rare and coveted even as early as 1912. Note that even the horse and dog are posing for the occasion.



"Phoenix from the Adams House," Phoenix, Arizona ca. 1908 shows the elaborate architecture of the territorial capital. This image provides an eastward view along Washington Street with Papago Butte in the background.



"Picture Rock near the Old Yuma Mine," Pima County, Arizona, ca. 1913 shows Flagg's interest in geologic artifacts.



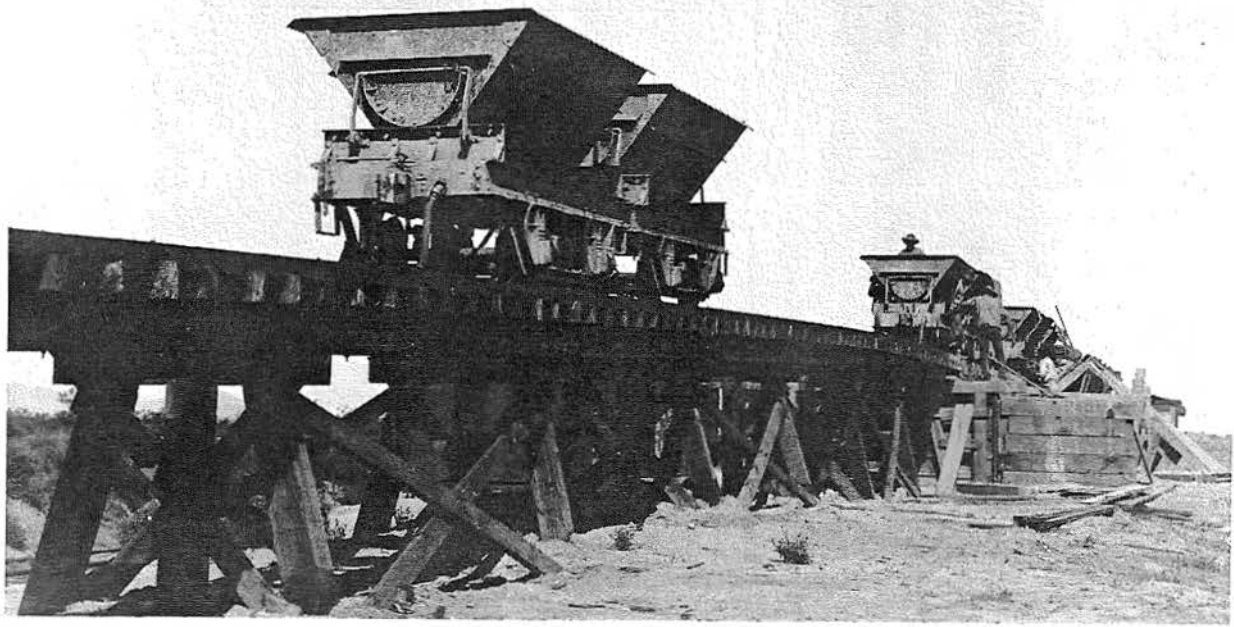
"Flow Structure," ca. 1913 is a geologic structure showing overturned flow lines in Golden Wash. Flagg's interest in geology was not limited to minerals. He captured and appreciated this structural feature in the field.



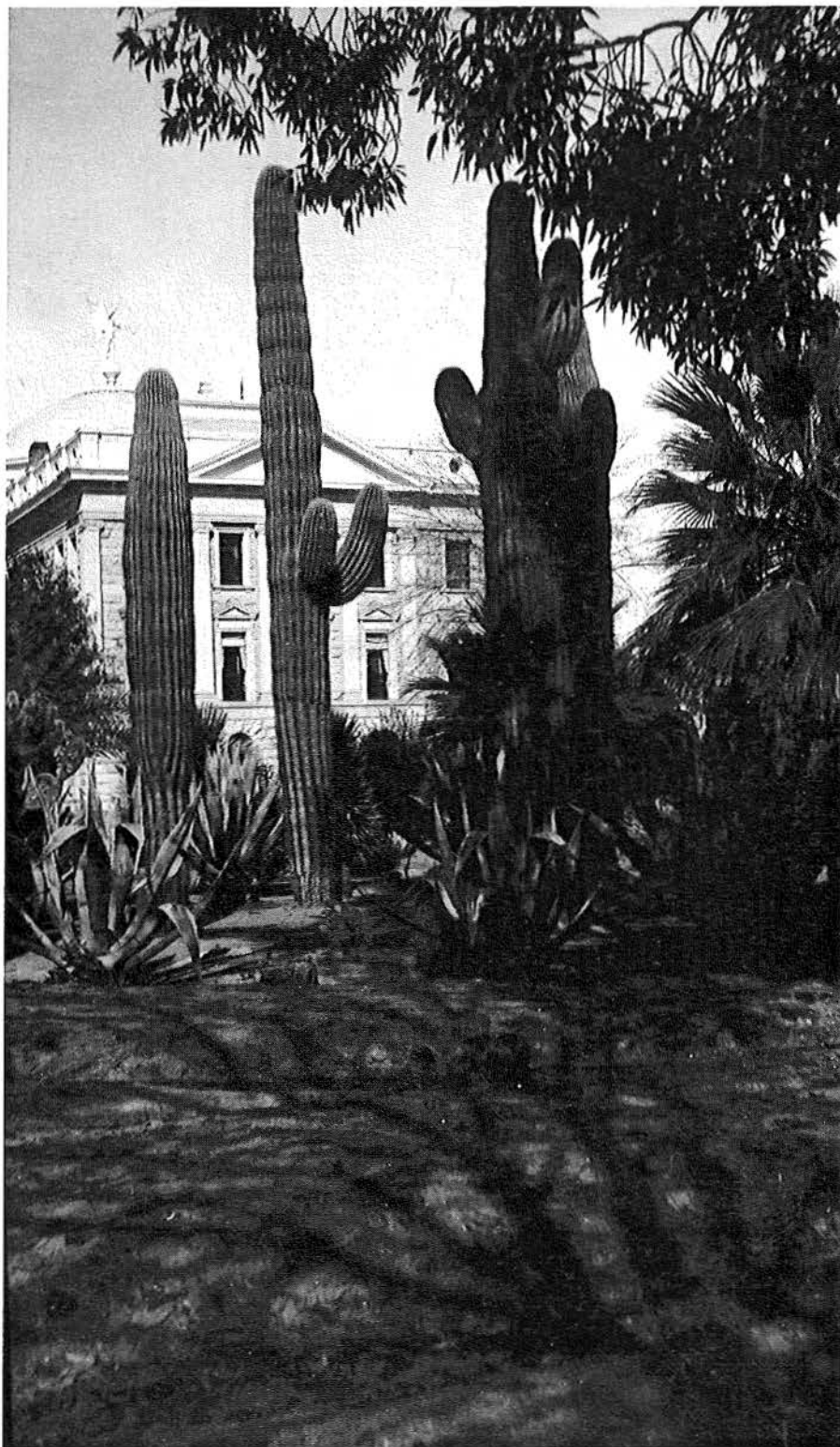
"El Paso & Southwestern Railroad Terminal," Tucson, Arizona ca. 1913 was an important depot that allowed the Phelps Dodge Corporation to freight with a company other than the Southern Pacific. The structure has been designated a historic site and since then has been turned into a Mexican food restaurant, "Carlos Murphy's."



"Judge Mundy," Hart California ca. 1915 posed for this Flagg photograph.



"Concentrate Cars," Webster, Arizona ca. 1916 illustrates the transport of concentrates on the Copper Basin Railroad.



"Cactus Garden," Phoenix, Arizona ca. 1908 showing the state capital before it became a steel and concrete jungle in the modern era. The cactus garden portrays the territorial capital in a natural setting when copper, cotton, cattle, and climate dominated life in the Southwest.