

O. A. Risdon House  
Clifton Townsite  
145 Frisco Street  
Clifton  
Greenlee County  
Arizona

HABS No. AZ-172

HABS  
ARIZ  
6-CLIFT,  
7-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Western Region  
Department of the Interior  
San Francisco, California 94107

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

O. A. RISDON HOUSE

HABS No. AZ-172

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7-

**Location:**

Clifton Townsite, 145 Frisco Street, Clifton, Greenlee County, Arizona

**Significance:**

Associated with prominent photographer O.A. Risdon and with the development of North Clifton. Excellent local example of Folk Victorian residential architecture.

**Description:**

The O.A. Risdon House is set on a large, open lot with a wrought iron fence surrounding the property. The house is of the Folk Victorian style. A front veranda of wood frame construction has Victorian detailing including turned porch posts and brackets. Concrete steps at the front veranda are an early addition. This one-story wood frame house has a sandstone foundation and a hip roof with a central gablet dormer/ventilator. The gablet is trimmed with Victorian gingerbread. The bottom end of each hip ridge is finished with a metal finial. Most of the original double-hung two-over-two patterned wood windows remain intact. Exterior materials include asbestos shingle siding and asphalt shingle roofing. An addition to the side of the house is early.

**History:**

This frame building was constructed ca. 1900 by W.E. Wells as a rental property. Wells homesteaded up the Frisco river at the time. In the 1925, prominent Clifton photographer Oliver Ambrose Risdon purchased the property for his family home.<sup>1</sup>

Risdon moved to Clifton in 1900 and established himself as the town's photographer. He erected a frame studio in 1902 on the bluff overlooking the San Francisco River on Clifton's east side across from the Clifton Hotel. Photo historian Heather Hatch called Risdon "a first-class portrait photographer." After the 1916 flood, Risdon moved his studio to Chase Creek. Risdon left Clifton during the difficult years following the copper slump in 1921, relocating to Los Angeles in 1923. In 1925 Risdon returned to Clifton and acquired this house in North Clifton. He sold the studio to Frank Gabusi in 1940 and Risdon died shortly after. Risdon is remembered today for his high-quality photographs, many of which are preserved at the Arizona Historical Society in Tucson. He is also remembered as a community activist by his stands against alcohol during prohibition and his agitation to clean up the "red light" district of Chase Creek.<sup>2</sup>

**Sources (endnotes):**

1. Sanborn fire insurance maps, 1901, 1904, 1908, 1914; interview with Harriet Sweeting, December 17, 1993.
2. Copper Era November 6, 1902 (I, 3: 1); October 17, 1919 (I, 2: 1); May 11, 1929 (I, 1: 6); April 25, 1931 (I, 5: 1); interview with Harriet Sweeting, December 17, 1993. Perhaps Risdon's most famous photograph is of the prohibition committee destroying booze confiscated in a raid on Cascarelli's Saloon in Metcalf and first published in the Copper Era on March 23, 1917 (I, 1: 5-6). The most authoritative work on Risdon is Heather Hatch, Karen Dahood, and Al V. Fernandez, "Clifton: Photography and Folk History in a Mining Town," Journal of Arizona History 23: 3 (Autumn 1982): 317-340. Local legend has it that Risdon died from a fall off the roof of this building. Risdon did indeed fall off the roof in 1927 when he was repairing some shingles, but his injuries were not serious and he returned to work the next day. See the Copper Era April 2, 1927 (I, 5: 2).

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