

HABS No. AZ-174-B

Arizona Copper Company Smelter Power House
Clifton Townsite
West of Frisco Street
Clifton
Greenlee County
Arizona

HABS
AZ-174-
6-CLIFTON
9B-

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

ARIZONA COPPER COMPANY SMELTER, POWER HOUSE

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9B-
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Location:

Clifton Townsite, West of Frisco Street, Clifton, Greenlee County, Arizona

Significance:

Associated with the Arizona Copper Co. and its smelter operations, and with the development of Clifton.

Description:

This large masonry building lies between Frisco Street and Coronado Boulevard (Arizona Highway 666) near the heart of Clifton. The site is relatively barren except for the building. The building is two stories in height with exposed (now painted) brick walls with a series of integral pilasters. The foundations are exposed sandstone. The roof is gabled, and covered in corrugated metal sheathing. Two cylindrical ventilators and a gabled monitor appear at the ridge. The original wood, double-hung, two-over-two windows appear to be intact throughout the building. An early addition was made to the west side, taking the form of a rectangular masonry block with twin gable roofs. A modern steel staircase leads to the entry of the addition. The date "1897" appears at the south gable. The building is now used as an electrical substation, and a large galvanized-steel frame now partly obscures the front (east face).

History:

This large two story brick building was constructed in 1897 as the power house for the Arizona Copper Company Smelter. A newspaper account in 1897 stated that the new power plant would be the "largest in Arizona when completed." In 1902 a one story addition was constructed on the west side of the building to house additional gas-powered electrical generating machinery. In 1907 a second addition was constructed to the north of the building for a steam generator. This second addition no longer remains.¹

Two events pushed the A.C. Co. to construct the building in 1897: a fire that year which destroyed a large portion of the smelter facility and the conversion to the Bessmer process of smelting which required larger amounts of electric power. Gas engines in the building powered turbines which produced the electricity. With the completion of the new A.C. Co. smelter south of town in 1914, all electricity for the mines, smelter, and town were produced by steam generated turbines at a facility in the new smelter location. The 1897 building continued to see use as an electric substation and the 1902 addition as a warehouse. After the smelter was closed in 1932, the power house at Morenci supplied all power to the Clifton-Morenci area. A new power plant was constructed in Morenci in 1941 with the new smelter.²

In addition to its importance by providing electrical power to the mines, smelter, and town, the A.C. Co. power house played a role in the 1915-1916 strike against the Company. At the beginning of the strike on Sunday, September 11, striking miners seized the power house and shut down the

works for three nights. On Wednesday, Sheriff James G. Cash took over the operation of the plant after persuading miners and mine owners that electric power should not be used as a bargaining chip in the strike. Nonetheless, the Sheriff shut down the power at 7:00 o'clock p.m. each evening until December 24 when he turned the plant back over to A.C. Co. officials.³

Sources (endnotes):

1. Arizona Silver Belt (Globe) May 27, 1897 (l, 2: 3); Copper Era January 16, 1902 (l, 3: 1); August 8, 1907 (l, 3: 1).
2. Bill Conger, "From Mules to Turbines for Power," Morenci Copper Review (clipping, n.d.).
3. Copper Era November 26, 1915 (l, 1: 6); December 24, 1915 (l, 1: 5); James R. Kluger, The Clifton-Morenci Strike: Labor Difficulty in Arizona, 1915-1916 (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1970), pp. 17-18.

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