



# The Blenman Inn

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## The Remarkable History of The Blenman Inn

### A True Historic Landmark

A significant part of The Blenman Inn experience – and what makes this experience unique over all others – is living within the magnificent surroundings of one of Arizona’s



oldest homes. Constructed in 1878, the Blenman House is thought to be the only known example in the world of a San Francisco Victorian home built in Territorial-style of adobe mud.

While the middle-19th Century is considered relatively modern-history for those visiting from the Eastern United States, Europe and most everywhere else in the world, this is

truly the infancy of the “pioneer” West and the early beginnings of modern Arizona.

Until the early 1850s, in fact, the Presidio of Tucson and all of what is now Southern Arizona belonged to Mexico, and even earlier, to Spain. The signing of the Gadsden Purchase in 1852 was the mechanism by which this land was finally brought into the United States.

James Gadsden (1788-1858), whose name the purchase bears, was a grandson of Christopher Gadsden (1724-1805), a South Carolina Revolutionary soldier and statesman who was captured by the British at Charleston and confined as a prisoner for ten months at St. Augustine.



Gadsden had long been interested in promoting railroads and upon his return to South Carolina in 1839 was chosen president of the South Carolina Railroad Company. His pet



dream was to knit all Southern railroads into one system and then to connect it with a Southern transcontinental railroad to the Pacific, to make the West commercially dependent on the South instead of the North. After engineers advised Gadsden that the most direct and practicable route for the Southern transcontinental railroad would be south of the United States boundary, he made plans to have the Federal Government acquire title to the necessary territory from Mexico. He planned to do so with help of his friend and fellow empire dreamer, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis. Gadsden was appointed U.S. Minister to Mexico by President Franklin Pierce with instructions of his own design to buy from Mexico enough territory for a railroad to the Gulf of California.

By the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, signed February 2, 1848, at the close of the Mexican War, the Republic of Mexico was compelled to abandon its claim to Texas and to cede to the United States the territory now comprising most of New Mexico, Arizona, California, Colorado, Utah and Nevada. The territory ceded to the United States by Mexico constituted about 200,000 square miles or two-fifths of all her territory.



In return for this vast territory, the United States gave \$15,000,000 to Mexico, but the United States still wanted to make certain “boundary adjustments” on behalf of Gadsden and his vision for a southern railroad route. With Mexico in need of money and desiring a settlement of her Indian claims against the United States, Gadsden agreed, in 1852, to pay Mexico \$10,000,000 for an additional strip of territory south of the Gila River and lying in what is now southwestern New Mexico and southern Arizona – including the Presidio of Tucson.

The U.S. Civil War soon broke-out. Confederate soldiers eventually found their way to Tucson and raised the rebel flag over the small Presidio—on a piece of ground now across the street from our home. Local residents were rather offended by this gesture, as most Westerners tended to be Northern-sympathizers – the North being the primary funding source and leadership for exploratory expeditions and the “taming of the West.” The California Cavalry was soon called-out to drive the Confederacy back as far as Texas –

making Tucson the Western-most battle of the U.S. Civil War. As the Civil War came to an end, the Indian Wars raged in Southern Arizona well into the 1870s when Charles Rivers Drake, a former Union US Army hospital steward (equivalent of a doctor at the time) broke ground on this home in 1878. Geronimo and Cochise were still very much a threat to both the agricultural focused tribes as well as the new settlers from the midwest and east coast.



Drake was born in Walnut Prairie, IL in 1843, entered the Navy when young and served 2 1/2 years in the Civil war. Later he was commissioned to provide contract labor and supplies to the recently-organized Southern Pacific Railroad Company in the laying of track between Los Angeles, California and El Paso, Texas. He chose this particular homesite because of its near equidistance along that 1,000 mile segment of track; the perennial fresh water supply offered by the nearby Santa Cruz River which flowed northbound out of Mexico, and because of the safety and protection offered by Fort Lowell – an adjacent Army fort erected during the Civil War that continued in operation, charged with sheltering Tucson residents from Indian attacks.

Drake's additional responsibilities included helping out at neighboring Fort Lowell and the tent city of soldiers which occupied what is now Armory Park. With a basic knowledge of medicine, he assisted in primitive surgeries and prescribing of medicine to personnel injured during the Arizona Indian Wars of the turbulent 1870s.



Having been in the mercantile business in San Francisco prior to his arrival in Tucson, he purchased the lot on Scott Avenue and ordered the original fir woodwork, hardware, and two 200-pound leaded glass skylights to be shipped from San Francisco to the frontier settlement of Tucson on horse-drawn wagon – all to be used in the construction of his new home. While in Tucson, Drake opened a number of businesses and was responsible for the building of many commercial structures in the downtown area. Drake represented Hercules Powder Co. and was a receiver for the land office, county recorder, and member of the Territorial legislature. Drake also was a member of the 14th



and 15th Assemblies of Arizona territory in Prescott and “made a good fight” for the University of Arizona by preventing the repeal of the bill which had been passed the previous session and vigorously assailed. Drake married Maria Agripina Arroyo Moreno in 1872, whose family had moved from Hermosillo, Mexico some years before. Her family was in the cattle business. They had 7 children and she died in 1888. Drake remarried Kate Seeley after he sold the home in 1891. He later moved to CA in 1901 & erected the

Virginia hotel at Long Beach where he remained until his death in 1928. Drake has many children from both marriages.

For about the next 90 years the Blenman family resided in the home after Louise Springer Blenman, wife of English attorney Charles Blenman purchased it in 1905 and per the deed “out of her own separate monies”. We are told, she also sat on a committee with other women & helped to bring arts and culture to the pioneer town of Tucson. They raised monies for the ground breaking for the Temple of Music and Art as well as applied for a grant for the Carnegie Library that is now the Children’s Museum.



Charles Blenman, an Oxford graduate, had sailed around Cape Horn en route to San Francisco. He practiced law in Tucson for more than 45 years and was affectionately known as “Judge” or “Barrister” throughout his career. The flagpole in the front yard of the Blenman Inn is the original one that Blenman erected. He was known for his patriotism, raising and lowering the flag on a daily basis. The “judge” entertained frequently at his home, being a brilliant storyteller and was known for his hospitality and for having a wide circle of friends.

Charles and Louise’s two sons, Charles Jr. and William grew up in the house and both joined the Navy. William attended the U.S. Naval Academy graduating in 1936, eventually earning the rank of Rear Admiral in 1958. He returned to Tucson in 1960. After William’s death, his wife Alice (per William’s will) later turned the House over to the Tucson Heritage Foundation in 1995 when she decided to move to New York state.

Charles, Jr. retired from the Navy as a Captain in 1964. He started as a pilot in 1937 and flew everything from biplanes to jets. Charles returned to Tucson and worked in the Optical Sciences Center at the U of A and research associate for the NASA Ames Research Center. During his tenure he oversaw the Pioneer 10 & 11, Jupiter and Saturn Missions. Before joining the U of A, Blenman had a meritorious 30 year career with the U.S. Navy. He was survived in December of 1991 by his wife Helen and sons William L. Blenman and Charles III.

When the last Blenman family member moved from the house in the 1995, the stipulation of the “Judge’s” will was that the home’s ownership be transferred to the Arizona Pioneers Historical Society, a private charitable organization.

The will written in the 1930s did not anticipate that by the 1990s so few members of this group survived that the house would have to be privately sold. The home which had been subdivided into apartments in the 1940s, stood vacant for several years before being purchased in the middle 1990s by Royal Henry, a Colorado contractor, and his wife Yvonne Elizabeth. The “Royal Elizabeth B&B” opened in 1999 after extensive remodeling and refurbishing, which included the restoring of all original woodwork, doors and trim which had been carefully packaged and stored in the attic since the home had been partially converted to apartments in the 1940s. Royal and Yvonne also completed the construction of the outdoor pool and spa, and also fully restored the historic outbuildings that included the carriage house, kitchen and bunkhouse. The house has been run ever since as a B&B and now an Inn. We are grateful to be stewards of history and provide that ‘ol’ world charm to our guests offering the finest amenities and service possible. Come, relax, refresh and enjoy!

