Timeline of the History of the Silver Bell Mining District

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| **Date** | **Arizona** | **Sasco** | **Silver Bell** |
| 1865 |  |  | The discovery of small irregularly distributed pockets of high-grade silver mineralization at the Old Boot mine attracted prospectors to the southwestern flank of the Silver Bell Mountains. |
| 1873 |  |  | Under the leadership of Charles O. Brown of Tucson, copper mining began at the Old Boot mine, also known as the Mammoth mine. |
| 1874 |  |  | Brown begins mining copper at the Young America Mine. Hand-sorted high-grade ores from these early operations were shipped by wagon to Yuma, Arizona for transshipment via boat to San Francisco smelters. Then, a small blast furnace was erected at Young America this year. |
| 1878 | Frank M Murphy arrives in  Arizona, develops interest in  Arizona mining. |  | 1880: Mining activities at Silver Bell increased following the completion of the Southern Pacific Railroad to Tucson from the west. |
| 1880s | Tombstone’s Grand Central silver mine closes because of flooding. |  |  |
| 1883 | William F Staunton, a mining engineer, began serving as chief engineer of Tombstone Mining and Milling Company. Also became part of DCA. |  |  |
| 1887 | “Diamond Joe” Reynolds purchases Congress gold mine near Wickenburg. Murphy assumes management of all of Reynolds’s Arizona properties.  Murphy founds Prescott National Bank. |  |  |
| 1890s | 1894: Murphy purchases Congress mine from Reynolds’s estate. |  | The Mammoth, Union, Young America (aka Oxide), and other small prospects were intermittently worked by a number of short-lived partnerships, companies and lessees during the 1890s. Among these early producers were the English-based Silver Bell Mining And Smelting Company Ltd. and Tucson Mining and Smelting Company Ltd. |
| 1901 | Murphy launches Development Company of America (DCA), which would oversee and finance a network of mines and railroad companies. Directors include Eliphlet Gage and Henry Robinson. Gage owned the Grand Central silver mine. DCA purchases Tombstone silver mines. |  | Early 1900s: Louis and William Zeckendorf and Albert Steinfeld, Jewish immigrants from Germany, who ran a prosperous mercantile business based in Tucson that distributed goods throughout Arizona and Sonora, Mexico acquired a large claim group in the Silver Bell mining district that included the Mammoth and Union mines in the northwest portion of the district. |
| 1903 |  |  | DCA purchases Union and Mammoth copper mines in the Silverbell Mountains and forms the Imperial Copper Company, Gage is president, Staunton is general manager. At this time, a 50-ton capacity smelter was in operation at Silverbell mine. Processed copper hauled by wagon to Southern Pacific Railroad at Red Rock. Staunton wanted a larger smelter for higher profits. |
| 1904 |  |  | The Arizona Southern Railroad connects Silverbell mines to the Southern Pacific Railroad at Red Rock. This was a 20.6-mile standard gauge rail line. The final four miles of the rail line employed a series of three switchbacks carved into the slopes of Jesuit Hill that negotiated the 400-foot change in elevation required to reach the Silverbell town site and mines. Imperial Copper Company commenced production in September with the shipment of high-grade ores to the Copper Queen smelter in Douglas, Arizona. |
| 1905 | The Mammoth, Union and Billy mines were important producers for the Imperial Copper Company. Other important early claim groups included the El Tiro property, located immediately west of Imperial Copper holdings in the northwest portion of the district and the Young America mine in the southeastern portion of the district. The El Tiro property was controlled by the Cleveland-Arizona Mining Company, which was succeeded by the El Tiro Copper Company in May 1907. The Young America mine was controlled by the Oxide Copper Company | Serious planning begins for a new smelter. Staunton selects a spot 7 miles west of Red Rock near Cerro Prieto, 2 miles from water supply from Santa Cruz River. | Consisting of shacks, tents and lean-tos, the town of Silverbell was established and rapidly grew to 1,000 by 1905. It included a post office, mine offices, railroad, a Wells Fargo station, company store, hotel, general merchandise store, a school, several saloons, billiard parlor, two bakeries, a dairy, two firehouses, theater and an auto stage (i.e. motorized stagecoach or bus). This Silver Bell Mountains and environs suffered from a lack of readily available potable water due the high mineral content of the local groundwater water. Throughout its brief history, drinking water was imported, first by mule and wagon and later by rail. The town's water supply was stored in tanks located adjacent to the company store and piped to two taps that were turned on for two hours each morning and night and sold to the town's residents. |
| 1906 |  | Southern Arizona Smelting Company founded, purchased by Imperial Copper Company, with Gage as president, Staunton as general manager, Meade Goodloe as superintendent and construction supervisor. |  |
| 1907 |  | Foundations of smelter taking shape. Small work camp set up, post office established. Official name of the community is Sasco. Staunton commutes often between Congress, Tombstone, Silverbell, and Sasco. Smelter plant also included power plant, a 500 kw turbine generator that also supplied electricity to the towns of Sasco and Silverbell.  Imperial Copper Company opens branch of its Silverbell department store, also a train station. Two competing stores open, owned by Oscar Rosan and Mr. Seron. The Rockland Hotel was owned by Heimbach and Decker. The A. Nielson & Company dealt with real estate, loans, and building materials. Tom Quong Budd and partners owned a restaurant.Jesus Gradias was the town’s shoemaker. R B Morales was the barber. |  |
| 1908 |  | Sasco smelter completed in February. J H Cready is day shift foreman and Joe Willetts is night shift foreman. In November, a second furnace was built. Two sections of the town: “Smelter Addition” on north side of railroad tracks housed working class community, “Barrio Americano” on south side of the tracks housed supervisors and engineers. |  |
| 1909 | In Tombstone, problems with fuel pump line caused main water pumps to fail. Everything below the 800 foot level flooded, including the pumps. DCA’s production in Tombstone stopped. | Population of Sasco reaches 600. 175 men on company payroll. Mexicans and Mexican-Americans make up majority of work crews. Sasco Townsite Company built and rented simple wood and canvas houses but poorer families lived only in simple hand-built huts called jacals, made of brush and dirt. | Sasco Townsite Company built and rented simple wood and canvas houses in Silverbell, but poorer families lived only in simple hand-built huts called jacals, made of brush and dirt. |
| 1910 | Because of Tombstone disaster, Staunton resigns from all the companies. Murphy led efforts to pump out water by end of year, but financial burden was more than DCA could support. | Of Sascos 500 residents, over a third were children.  Tombstone disaster resulted in lack of ore flowing from Silverbell to Sasco’s smelter. Smelter ceased operations on August 10. | Tombstone disaster caused a lack of funds, causing Silverbell mines to halt development. Many of the private businesses left after the mines closed, only a grocery store and saloon surviving. |
| 1911 | DCA declares bankruptcy. Tombstone mines sold to Copper Queen Mining Company. The Imperial Copper Company and Arizona Southern Railroad placed into receivership with M P Freeman as receiver and trustee. |  |  |
| 1915 | American Smelting & Refining Company (ASARCO) takes interest in the Silverbell mines and Sasco smelter. |  |  |
| 1916 | The courts approve foreclosure and sale of Imperial Copper Company properties to Leo Goldschmidt of Tucson who enters into agreement with ASARCO whereby stock and deeds to the mine, smelter, and railroad would be transferred to ASARCO once Goldschmidt is reimbursed for original purchase price plus interest fees. | Under ASARCO’s management, the town of Sasco enjoyed a short revival. A small school house was built for workers’ children. A two-room jail was constructed. | Encouraged by the high copper prices of the World War I era, ASARCO refurbished the rail line connecting Silverbell with Red Rock and resumed operations at Silver Bell and the Sasco smelter in May. Limited copper production was also renewed at the El Tiro and Young America mines. The population of Silverbell rebounded to 1,200. |
| 1918 | The end of World War I in November 1918 brought a decline in the price of copper. | Sasco’s population reaches over 1,000 people. New businesses include a general merchandise store, several groceries, two assayers, and a billiards hall. Alice Kemper ran the post office. Brother Robert delivered mail to Red Rock. |  |
| 1919 | El Tiro Copper Company was sold at public auction in January 1919 under a mortgage foreclosure sale to G. D. Bouton, who served as trustee for the bond holders. It was subsequently leased to the El Tiro Leasing Company, which was incorporated in April 1919 to resume operations at the site. | ASARCO ceases operations at SASCO smelter. World-wide influenza epidemic passed through the settlement. Post office closes. |  |
| 1920 |  |  | Following the closure of the Sasco smelter, ASARCO continued limited shipments of ore to its Hayden smelter prior to suspending all mining operations at Silver Bell in late 1920. |
| 1921 | Arizona Southern Railroad ceases operations. All production ceased with the closure of El Tiro Leasing Company's underground operations in April 1921. | Sasco’s link to outside world cut off by railroad’s shutdown. |  |
| 1922 | The El Tiro Leasing Company resumed production from the Kurtz shaft. |  |  |
| 1928 |  |  | ASARCO acquires control of the El Tiro property which had been operating since 1922. |
| 1930 |  |  | Following the crash of the stock market in October 1929, falling copper prices once again forced Asarco to suspend its Silver Bell operations. |
| 1931 |  |  | The population of Silverbell, which averaged around 500 during the 1920s, fell to fewer than 50 by 1931. |
| 1933 |  | The Sasco smelter is demolished. |  |
| 1940 |  |  | Asarco purchased the Oxide Copper property and the El Tiro Copper property. |
| 1946-1964 | During the two decades following the end of World War II, an increasing demand for copper resulted in expansions at many existing U. S. mining operations and the development of new mines. Expansions included the development of open pit operations at former underground producers such as Bagdad, Inspiration, Ray, Bisbee, and Butte during the late 1940s and 1950s. New copper projects were commissioned at Yerington in 1953, Silver Bell and Copper Cities during 1954, Pima and San Manuel during 1955, Esperanza in 1959, Mission in 1961, and Mineral Park in 1964.  BS&K Mining operates the Atlas mine, a small underground zinc producer, adjacent to ASARCO’s North Silver Bell property, 1947 until October 1964 |  |  |
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| 1950 | With the start of the Korean War in June, concerns grew over shortages of copper, a strategic metal. |  |  |
| 1951 |  |  | In November, ASARCO entered an agreement with the Defense Material Procurement Agency under which ASARCO agreed to finance the development of its Silver Bell property in exchange for a guarantee by the Federal Government to purchase 177 million pounds of the first 197 million pounds of copper production. In an effort to avoid delays, ASARCO hired Isbel Construction Company to commence pre-production stripping and mine development activities. Contracts were also negotiated and signed with the Utah Construction Company to build a townsite and Stearns Rodger Manufacturing Company to erect a 7,500 ton/day concentrator. |
| 1952 |  |  | One of the first things that needed to be done at this remote site was to provide supporting infrastructure for the workers. A new paved road was built from Plata, a rail siding near Rillito on the Southern Pacific Railroad, across Arva Valley to Silver Bell. This new company-owned community was located at an elevation of 2,650 feet in a low lying pass between the Silver Bell and Waterman Mountains. The first buildings erected at this site were apartments and bunkhouses for the construction workers. Approximately 65 two-bedroom (880 square foot) and 35 three-bedroom (1,062 square foot) prefabricated homes were manufactured on an assembly line in Tucson and transported by truck to Silver Bell between April 1952 and September 1952. There were also two trailer courts, which could each accommodate 90 trailers. Water was supplied by six wells located in Arva Valley, approximately 9 miles east of the townsite. In addition to housing, supporting infrastructure also included a general store, mess hall, post office, barber shop, gas station, swimming pool, recreation hall, and baseball field. |
| 1953 |  |  | Stripping of waste in the El Tiro area began in March 1953. |
| 1954 |  |  | The first ore was processed in March and operations achieved commercial production in May. Projected mine life at start-up was 12 to 13 years. The Silver Bell project was brought in under budget with total capital expenditures amounting to slightly less than $17 million. It was also a milestone for ASARCO, being its first large scale open pit mine. It also represented a major step toward greater integration of mining operations into what had largely been a smelting and refining business. |
| 1956 |  |  | Approximately one-third of the Silver Bell's production was derived from the El Tiro pit. The 4.1 mile haul road connecting the El Tiro pit and mill site was paved to reduce tire wear. Mining of ore from the El Tiro pit also occurred during the afternoon shift (4:00 PM to 12 midnight), because of cooler temperatures and better truck performance on the long haul to the crusher. |
| 1957 |  |  | ASARCO personnel took over the duties performed by the contract miner, Isbel Construction on April 1. |
| 1970 |  |  | The company-owned town of Silver Bell had grown to about 1,000 residents. There were 176 homes, 24 apartments, 30 trailer spaces, 2 bunkhouses, a mess hall, general store, barber shop, U. S. post office (85270), and recreational facilities that included a swimming pool and ball park. School children attended public schools in Marana. |
| 1981 |  |  | With the collapse of the copper price from $1.33 in February 1980 to $0.79 per pound in December 1981, mining and milling operations at Silver Bell were suspended on December 23. However, precipitate operations continued to recover copper from the leach dumps. |
| 1982 |  |  | Of the 175 company-owned homes in the town of Silver Bell, 100 were sold and moved to other locations, 46 were still occupied and the remainder boarded up by the end of 1982. |
| 1984 |  |  | Operations were permanently halted on August 15, 1984. Only 15 to 18 workers were retained to continue recovering copper from the dump leaching operations and maintain the facilities. |
| 1984-1987 |  |  | With the cessation of mining operations at Silver Bell in August 1984, its sulfide concentrator was placed on care and maintenance status and eventually closed. Housing and other infrastructure at the Silver Bell company townsite was also demolished, making it necessary for the mine's personnel to find living accommodations elsewhere.  Although annual copper production declined to 7 to 13 million pounds during this thirteen year period, efforts to resume full-scale mining operations at Silver Bell continued. This work included evaluation of an area known as North Silver Bell, located on land controlled by ASARCO and BS&K Mining. |
| 1988 |  |  | After several years of surface exploration, ASARCO commenced an infill drilling program at North Silver Bell in 1988. |
| 1990 |  |  | ASARCO purchased the adjacent BS&K property from the American Pacific Mining Company in 1990. |
| 1994 |  |  | Ore reserves at Silver Bell stood at 101.3 million tons, averaging 0.47% copper, including approximately 80 million tons of ore at North Silver, averaging 0.4% copper. |
| 1995 |  |  | Mitsui & Company, Inc. purchased a 25% interest in the Silver Bell project from ASARCO for $15 million, forming the Silver Bell Mining LLC. |
| 1996 |  |  | Construction of the SX-EW plant began in January 1996 and mining operations resumed, employing used mining equipment from ASARCO's Ray and Mission mines as a cost savings measure. Following a short period of pre-production stripping, the first ores from the North Silver Bell area were stacked on the leach dumps in December. |
| 1997-  present |  |  | With the commissioning of the SX-EW plant in July 1997, Silver Bell became a leach-only operation, producing copper from low-grade oxide and chalcocite bearing ores. Since that time, both conventional open pit/dump leach and in-place leaching methods have been employed at Silver Bell. |
| 2000 | President Bill Clinton used the Antiquities Act of 1906 to create the Ironwood Forest National Monument. As a result, ASARCO was required to remove a pipeline, power line, and road from federal lands lying within the boundaries of the monument. The creation of the Ironwood Forest National Monument severely restricted efforts by ASARCO and others to explore and develop known and/or suspected porphyry copper targets on adjacent public lands along the northwest trending zone of mineralization. |  |  |
| 2010 |  |  | ASARCO LLC increased its interest in the Silver Bell project to 100% through the purchase of Mitsui Mining's 25% interest in the project. |
| 2018 |  |  | The Silver Bell Historical Society was formed as a non-profit corporation to preserve the legacy of the Silver Bell Mining District. |
| 2019 |  |  | More than 350 people attended the Grand Silver Bell Reunion, hosted by the Silver Bell Historical Society, with support from local businesses and ASARCO’s Silver Bell Mine administrators. A monument commemorating the history of the Silver Bell communities was dedicated. |