

A History of Tucson

Tucson's nickname is 'the Old Pueblo', and its history does indeed go back to ancient times. Immigrants from across the Bering Strait settled in the Tucson area almost ten thousand years ago. Starting out as hunters of the huge prehistoric animals in the area, they gradually adapted a hunter-gatherer lifestyle that lasted for millennia.



In approximately 100 CE, the first major civilization developed in the Tucson area. These were the Hohokam, a crop-growing people that lived in small, spread out villages. The Hohokam civilization lasted until approximately 1100 CE, after which they slowly declined. The reasons for their ultimate disappearance are not definitively known, but some of the Hohokam eventually developed into the Tohono O'odham and the Akimel O'odham (the Akimel were known by the Spanish as the Pima, after which Pima County is named), who still live in the area today. In fact, Tucson gets its name from Cuk Son, or Black Base, a Tohono village at the base of what is now A Mountain.

The O'odham and their ancestors were not the only people to settle in the Tucson area. In approximately 1300 CE, the Apaches arrived. Migrants from modern Alaska, the Apache and their close kinsmen the Navajo quickly gained a reputation as a fierce warrior people, and clashed frequently with other groups already in the area.

The Apaches were followed by the Spanish. The first Spaniard to explore the area was Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, who travelled from Mexico all the way to Kansas in the mid-1500s. Spanish missionaries established permanent missions soon after, followed by settlers. Tucson was officially founded as a Spanish presidio to defend against Apache attacks in 1775 by Hugo O'Connor, an Irish soldier in the employ of the Spanish empire.

Mexico became independent from Spain in 1821, and Tucson became a Mexican town. Most of Arizona was ceded to the United States at the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848, but Tucson itself became part of the USA in 1854 when Mexico bought the southern part of Arizona and part of New Mexico in the Gadsden Purchase. Tucson was briefly occupied by the Confederacy during the American Civil War, but it was reconquered by the Union Army in 1862 without a shot being fired. On March 20, 1880, a silver spike was pounded into the tracks on the Tucson depot of the Southern Pacific Railroad, connecting Tucson to the rest of the country and bringing the Old Pueblo into the modern era.

From prehistory to modern times Tucson has been a haven in the desert to people with many different origins, cultures, and ideas. It is a truly diverse city with a long history of independent people meeting challenges through hard work and innovation. We welcome you as just the latest in a long line of visitors to the Old Pueblo.