

## AT ORACLE AND INA: THE CONTEXT OF THE GABRIELLE GIFFORDS SHOOTING

By: Tom Zoellner

In order to understand how Arizona grew as it did, it helps to take a deeper examination of how it has been packaged and sold to the rest of the world.

European influence on Tucson began in 1692 when Jesuit missionaries followed the Santa Cruz River northward into a lonely northern frontier they called Pimeria Alta. They found a small prehistoric volcano that a local clan told them was called *Cuk Son*, for “black base.” The representatives of the Spanish king bastardized the name into *Tucson*, erected a fort and a convent and built a whitewashed church several miles south. They suppressed some minor insurrections among the Pima, but mainly helped them run punitive campaigns against their new enemies to the east, the Apache, who attacked under a full moon to steal cows and weapons. The Spanish found themselves drawn into *la guerra de fuego y sangria*, a war of fire and blood, that flailed in varied iterations for more than two centuries.

The Indian raids were only aggravated by the discovery of new wealth. In 1736, when a Yaqui Indian found big chunks of silver near a natural waterhole about sixty miles to the south in present-day Mexico, it set off a prospectors rush to the area, which became known as *Arizonac*, for the Pima Indian phrase *ali shonak* which means small spring. The silver turned out to be largely a mirage, not much more than a shallow reef. The boom quickly dried up and the settlement fell apart, but the legend of the buried treasure hidden in the spring became a regional myth among the Spanish settlers – a local El Dorado – and the name *Arizonac* became synonymous with fast riches, in the same way that Klondike would become a byword for a gold strike in the 1890s.

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The capital of the scruffy region was Tucson at the base of that black hill, and it might have remained part of the Republic of Mexico to this day, a multiethnic soup of Spanish, Pima and civilized Apache, but it became a part of the United States because of two driving factors -- technology and race.

The railroad came into widespread use in the U.S. during the 1840s and it brought a whole new understanding of time and space. The rough places in the continent like the future territory of Arizona suddenly became important links in what would be the welded joints that would soon bolt the country together. When Congress sent out surveying parties to scout out the easiest iron road to link ocean to ocean, the thirty-second parallel – which passed through what is now Southern Arizona – was favored by the future Confederate president Jefferson Davis, who was then the U.S. Secretary of War. A slave-colony promoter named James Gadsden went to Mexico City with a Congressional mandate to buy a vast chunk of land south of the Gila River for \$10 million, a deal known as the Gadsden Purchase.

Tucson thus became a slave-state prize within an awkward wedge of new American territory, its borders marked by piles of white rocks that were just as quickly knocked over and scattered by resentful *Tucsonenses*. The “government” was a thin brace of U.S. Army soldiers, hated by the locals for their rude bearing and their drinking binges. An Irish-American mining engineer named J. Ross Browne passed through Tucson around this time and was not happy with what he saw: “A city of mud boxes, dingy and dilapidated, cracked and baked into a composite of dust and filth; littered about with broken corrals, sheds, bake-ovens, carcasses of dead animals, and broken pottery; barren of verdure, parched, naked, and grimly desolate in the glare of a southern sun, adobe walls without whitewash inside or out, hard earth-floors, baked and dried Mexicans, sore-backed burros, coyote dogs, and terra-cotta children.”

But if Tucson was a ragamuffin burg, Phoenix was a cockeyed real-estate scheme. The Hohokam Indians had built a sophisticated culture in the valley of the Salt River between the years of 650 to about 1450. The secret to their success was canals, which diverted the precious water away from the bitter-tasting Salt and into fields where they grew corn and squash. They put as much as sixty thousand acres under

cultivation and left a chain of forts atop the knobby peaks; one could pass a message to another by wagging a shiny object in the sun. Then the Hohokam disappeared – nobody is sure why. One theory has it that a flood destroyed the canals, another blames tribal warfare. The canals filled with silt and sand, almost erased from the land.

After the U.S. Civil War, when swarms of ex-soldiers went looking for silver on the Hassayampa River fifty miles outside present-day Phoenix<sup>1</sup>, a beady-eyed Georgian named Jack Swilling organized a shovel crew to dig out a section of the old Indian canal system to irrigate vegetables for the silver miners. The farming community settled on its name after an English resident named Darrell Duppa, with a taste for whiskey and high oratory, made a rambling speech about a new civilization rising from the ashes of an ancient one, like the mythic twice-born Greek bird. The street layout was a proper Midwestern grid. The north-south streets were named for numbers, the east-west for American presidents. And newcomers flooded in, most of them trying to get away from the dead hand of the East.

“This is a place where you would come to reinvent yourself,” said the official State Historian Marshall Trimble. “If you were successful where you were from, why would you come out to this godforsaken inhospitable place? Broken health, broken wealth, broken lives. They were, quite frankly, losers.”

Swilling later died in the Territorial prison at Yuma, addicted to lanadum, and serving a sentence for a stagecoach robbery he didn't commit. The supply town he helped found grew phenomenally, even without a transcontinental railroad link or a starter heritage of Spanish settlement. Phoenix's founders believed their pure Anglo culture was a crowning virtue. An 1891 chamber of commerce publication would brag about “a valley of wonderful fertility” in which there were “none of the sleepy, semi-Mexican features of the more ancient towns of the Southwest.”

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<sup>1</sup> Then called “Pumpkinville”

Phoenix would fancy itself, as Los Angeles eventually would, as a “white spot,” a paradise of Midwestern Protestant values in the midst of spectacular rugged promontories, where a man and his family might reinvent their lives in the cleansing air of the West without the frightening qualities of Mexican or indigenous cultures, already regulated to the far margins of daily life, yet whose culture was sanitized and bleached almost beyond recognition through home design, cuisine and charming street names, a Southwestern form of imperial nostalgia. This different somewhat from the way things were done in Tucson, which came as much from economic self-interest – and plain lust -- as it did from notions of tolerance. It was common practice for the bachelor American men to take young Mexican women, often teenagers, as their brides.

Though the local attitude toward Mexicans was more easygoing in Tucson, a different kind of racial paranoia was in the air. Apache raiders had run cattle off ranches in night raids and killed a settler from Connecticut and his Mexican mistress, whose cheap gold breastpin was later rumored to have been found in the possession of an Apache woman. Many of Arizona’s penny newspapers from this era read like bills of indictment against the Apache menace – “make no truce and show no mercy to adult males,” counseled the *Weekly Arizonan* -- and shooting them on sight had become standard procedure for many settlers. “We have a horror of them that you feel for a ghost,” recalled one. “We never see them, but when on the road are always looking over our shoulders in anticipation.” The lust for extermination was mounting.

The new mayor made things worse. William Oury was a humorless Virginian who had seen a lot of blood and therefore had credibility. Why didn’t he write history, someone once wanted to know, and he snapped: “Because I’m too damn busy making it!” He traveled west as a young man to join the Texas War of Independence and was posted to the Alamo shortly before it was surrounded by General Antonio Lopez Santa Anna’s army. Commander William Travis sent him out as a courier to plead for reinforcements shortly before all inside were slaughtered; it made him one of the last Anglos to leave the fortified chapel alive. He later joined the hell-raising vigilantes known as the Texas Rangers and fought in northern Mexico for the

U.S. Army and found a war bride: a 19-year-old Mexican named Inez Garcia. By the time he arrived in Tucson to run a dairy farm in 1856, he had a rich stock of yarns as well as fluent Spanish learned from his wife. Two duels he survived in Tucson did little to injure his reputation. People started calling him “Uncle Billy” and he got himself appointed the first mayor in 1870, and then became the head of the less-savory “Committee of Public Safety,” which dedicated itself to solving the Apache problem -- bluntly and thoroughly. The federal government was doing nothing to send troops or security to this border free-for-all and Arizona citizens decided to go it alone. The hysteria was reminiscent of the present-day feelings about immigrants from Mexico.

Oury and his friends planned to make their point at a miserable place called Camp Grant near the flats of the San Pedro River where the walls of the canyon close in. A soft-hearted captain named Royal Whitman, a Quaker, had allowed about five hundred Pinal and Aravaipa Apaches to squat nearby at a place they named Big Sycamore Stands Alone, where they received government handouts of flour and dried beef. For Mayor Oury, it must have seemed like a replay of his Texas Rangering days as he and his friend Juan Elias gathered up forty-eight Mexicans and ninety-four revenge-minded O’Odham into a brigade to teach a lesson to “the most bloodthirsty devils that ever disgraced mother earth.” They marched two days over Redington Pass toward Aravaipa Creek, and when the sun came up on April 30, the six Anglo commanders, including Oury, watched from high ground as their O’Odham and Mexican subalterns charged into the valley and opened up a killing zone. Heads were dashed open on rocks, women were raped and children were kidnapped for later sale in Mexico. Within half an hour, three-hundred were dead. The wickiups were burned into ashes and the corpses left to draw flies in the rising sun.

The committee thundered back into Tucson in a cloud of triumph and ambiguity, all of them sworn to a secret oath that was quickly broken as the stories leaked out in taverns. Eastern journalists called the massacre a disgrace and ran stories exposing a “Tucson ring” of wagon freighters who had been deliberately antagonizing the Indians in order to keep doing business with the Army and reaping profit from war, which

was, complained one exhausted general, the “economic foundation” of the whole territory. President Ulysses S. Grant threatened to bring down martial law if there was no trial for the perpetrators – and there would be, a hollow one in which Whitman testified weakly: “I saw the dead bodies of children, perhaps six. They had died apparently by gunshot wounds.” The one hundred defendants were acquitted in just nineteen minutes of jury deliberations; sidewalk opinion in Tucson held that the action had been distasteful but necessary, though few were aware of just how gruesome and one-sided the slaughter was at Aravaipa. The Apaches lost their historic claim on lands to the east of Tucson and accepted resettlement to the San Carlos Reservation, where they live today. After one last spectacular breakout by Geronimo in 1885, followed by a year of raiding, the Indian wars in Arizona came to an end. “The survival of the fittest holds here as everywhere and the dominant race has asserted itself,” noted a promotional pamphlet called *The Resources of Arizona*.

The Camp Grant Massacre went down the memory hole. Few of the participants wanted to talk about what happened. The pillars of the community remained pillars. When the tracks of the Southern Pacific Railroad reached Tucson on March 20, 1880, Oury himself gave a florid welcoming address in front of the locomotives. Five years later, he made an end-justifies-the-means speech at Pioneer Hall. “Behold now the happy result immediately following that episode,” he told the audience. “On the Sonoita, Santa Cruz, and all other settlements of southern Arizona, new life springs up, confidences restored and industry bounds forward with an impetus that has known no check in the whole fourteen years since that occurrence.”

The railroad did far more to alter Tucson than the forgotten “occurrence.” The freighting firm of Tully & Ochoa was soon out of business. Tucson’s population rocketed to nine thousand within a year and the oligarchic Latino character of the town, and the unions between old men and teenage brides, began to diminish. The main drag – Calle de la Alegria (Spanish for “happiness street”) – had been renamed Congress Street. The new immigrants from Texas and Ohio built their family homes in the country squire style of British manors: a square box plopped in the middle of the lot to suggest verdant fields. Many of these homes were shipped out on the Southern Pacific Railroad as prefabricated kits.

Tucson had very little native vegetation that could be considered verdant so the newcomers imported citrus fruit trees, Chinaberry trees, shrubs and rosebushes – as well as carpets of tough, all-weather Bermuda grass -- to disguise the ragged character of the desert which surrounded them on all sides, shielding the house from relentless sunshine and affording privacy from neighbor eyes.

Big water arrived in Arizona courtesy of the federal government. In 1902, Congress passed the Newlands Reclamation Act authorizing the construction of dams and dusty Phoenix was one of the top beneficiaries. The largest masonry dam in the world was built in a canyon at the confluence of the Salt River and Tonto Creek, creating a massive artificial lake. The dam itself was a kind of stone sandwich, a design called “cyclopean rubble,” which amounted to limestone walls on either side filled up in the middle with a mixture of concrete and boulders. Theodore Roosevelt came out in 1911 to dedicate the dam named in his honor and predicted that Phoenix would be “one of the richest agricultural areas of the world.” The Salt River promptly stopped flowing and became an empty indentation, its contents now sluiced onto the succulent green fields of alfalfa and cotton at the edge of the settlement.

There wasn't much to water in northwest Tucson in the 1940s except for a few cotton farms in the valleys and a big grove of orange trees, date palms and bougainvillas. But the crossing of Oracle and Ina would soon become a hot corner to buy land and the man who had seen its potential first was an immigrant named Silvio Nanini, born on a flower farm in Ponte Buggianese, Italy in 1885. His immense fortune would be founded on the growth of American highway culture.

Nanini left Italy on a steamer when he was 15, changed his name to “Sam,” and drifted to Chicago in 1911, eager to make money. One of his ideas was to start a candy store, and when he would make taffy, he aimed a portable electric fan to blow the fragrance of it out onto the street, the sweetness its own best advertising. With some friends, he bought a Diamond T truck and started an asphalt hauling business called Rock Road Construction, which soon grew rich from all the municipal highway contracts being doled out in

northern Illinois. They later built a string of concrete plants and paved the runways at what would become O'Hare airport.

In 1936, Sam started vacationing in Tucson, telling everyone that his wife Giaconda suffered from asthma and the dust-free thermal belt of the Southwest was good for her lungs. A bit of family legend has it that Sam went out on horseback with a real estate dealer and they came over a rise which afforded a lengthy view of empty Sonoran desert, stretching out to the base of Sombrero Peak, a horizon of mesquite and ocotillo crisscrossed with a few lonely dirt roads. Many years later, Jared Lee Loughner would grow up, go to school, work at fast-food restaurants and attempt to go to community college all on land that Sam Nanini saw that day. "I want all of it," he said. "But the condition is, the deal has to close tomorrow." He would eventually buy thirty thousand acres for an average of about \$25 per acre. At the eastern edge of his new estate was the corner of Oracle and Ina, where the Safeway at La Toscana would stand one day.

Lots of cars heading to Phoenix, but zero foot traffic. You would not walk up there unless you were crazy.

Nanini built a tawny rectangle of shops there he called Casas Adobes Plaza -- literally, *mud houses*, a Fifties strip mall of the sort popping up in suburbs all over the place, but done with a little Mediterranean class. The storefronts were lined with Roman columns and the sidewalks were shaded with olive trees; marble frescoes were shoehorned into the walls; a fountain was shipped over from the Italian quarry town of Carrara. A Food Giant took the biggest anchor space -- what a later-generation of real-estate cowboys would later call a "pull store" -- and a quirky hardware emporium called Bullards took up the second-biggest. Defender Drug had a lunch counter, which was the only thing resembling a restaurant for miles. Surplus palm trees were planted in the median of Oracle Road.

One design element had symbolic power above all others: ten acres of parking was out in front. Shopping was becoming a ritual you did with a car once or twice a week instead of going to the market on foot every day, as refrigerators and freezers were becoming as easy to buy on credit as the car. Casas Adobes



therefore featured parking spaces *out in front* to advertise. The automobile and the shopping center would attract the development just as surely as taffy scent blown down the street.

This was not the Main Street of the sidewalk and the pedestrian. Here in Tucson and all over the nation, common spaces were being set back from the street level, surrounded with lakes of black asphalt, the same way that homes had shrunken into their lots in imitation of English manors, with sidewalks discouraged and rare. The outdoor passageways between Sam's specialty shops were some of the only pedestrian spaces within five miles. A person who would go there on foot was slightly suspicious.

The land around this shopping center was divided into three instant neighborhoods with interchangeable names: Casas Adobes, Casas Adobes Heights and Casas Adobes Country Club. Each lot had to be a minimum of one acre, which guaranteed a more affluent class of homebuyer and meant that it would also be exclusively white. There would be no press-stamped in Casas Adobes. This was custom-builders territory. Nanini broke with the Tucson developer's tradition of making up phony Spanish names for his streets, *Camino Fill-in-the-Blank*, and instead used names reminiscent of his native Italy: Via Assisi, Siena Drive, Leonardo da Vinci Way. Giaconda Drive was for his wife. He told the newspapers that he wanted to build "the best community anyone has ever seen" and he was rewarded with fawning coverage. His silver cowboy belt buckle was a giant S, and he wore it when trotting around on his favorite horse.

Sam didn't talk much in Tucson about where all of his money had come from. But as was inevitable for a Chicago construction boss in the Thirties, he had dealings with the underworld. According to his grandson Steve Nanini, one day in 1931, as Sam went to City Hall to pick up a check, a black Cadillac limousine pulled up to the curb and a hulking figure emerged, grabbed him by the arm and told him to climb in. Sitting there in the backseat was Al Capone, who said, "You know, Nanini, you're doing pretty good and we need your help...I have some business I want to talk to you about." Capone asked him to repave the driveway in front of his west side house and replace the Olympic-size swimming pool. The crews were there the next morning and Capone was pleased with the work when it was finished. "You did a great job," he told

Sam. “We won’t forget you.” Rock Road soon had a number of lucrative city contracts that seemingly came from nowhere.

Tucson was also the retirement home of Joseph “Joe Bananas” Bonnano who oversaw a network of shakedowns and heroin-running in New York in the Fifties. A funeral home he owned was supposed to have been a primary dumping ground for corpses; they were simply stuffed into the coffins of other customers and buried in eternal embrace with a stranger. Bonanno went into hiding in 1968 and then bought a home at 1847 E. Elm Street telling people he was retired because the Sicilian “traditions” of respect and obedience were no longer valued among the younger mob muscle. He bought lots of land around town, including thirty acres in Sam Nanini’s Catalina Citrus Estates, and went out to strip-mall Italian restaurants. A place called Conti’s across the street from what would eventually be La Toscana Village was a favorite and he went there with a large entourage of sycophants. *The Arizona Daily Star* gave him softhearted treatment and covered his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party like a Chamber of Commerce banquet. “He’s been a wonderful, intelligent, loving godfather to us all,” said a Pima Community College professor, charitably looking past his many suborned homicides. Sen. John McCain sent a congratulatory note by telegram.

But Tucson was never a mafia base of operations. The city only provided for its geriatrics and outcasts the same type of quiet pleasures that it was offering to tens of thousands of other inter-America migrants -- an unobtrusive government, low property taxes, an orgiastic display of cheap land and machine-cooled interiors that fronted a heroic wilderness. One chamber of commerce brochure from 1958 promised a playtime milieu of swimming pools amid a dotting of postcard-perfect saguaros. “Ranch living has become almost standard with Tucson executives who are still within easy driving distance of all the city’s commercial and industrial areas.” Why would you want to live in Chicago or Worcester when this was an option? The segregation was tidy and nearly complete, even though immigrant Mexican labor had quietly helped to build a huge number of the homes in The Foothills. The city had rocketed to prosperity on the same factors that had driven the Gadsden Purchase in 1854: race and technology. Then the race question had been

one of American slaves and not cheap Mexican labor, and the technology had been that of the railroad instead of the automobile. But the base factors were the same.

None of this invented landscape would have been possible without artificial cooling. Summers were close to unbearable, and one common night practice was to hang wet bedsheets from the eaves of a porch and drag a cot nearby where the evaporation created a cooling effect. This trick of nature was aided with the advent of a device called a swamp cooler -- a large box lined with wet excelsior pads and a large fan that blew out moisturized air. Chemical air conditioning was more expensive, but in the Twenties, the Carrier Engineering Corp. of Newark, New Jersey introduced the Weathermaker unit, which could hang mounted in a window. Phoenix soon led the nation in unit sales, which were up to one million per year by 1953. The era of the wet bedsheet was over. Adobe walls became decorative instead of practical, as the A/C unit became like a family hearth without the conviviality of a central gathering spot. It also enticed big defense companies to relocate here. "Motorola management feels that refrigeration cooling is the complete solution to the Phoenix summer heat problem," said Dan Noble, the executive vice president of the transistor company, which moved a plant to Phoenix in 1949.

Hughes Aircraft Company built a missile factory in Tucson two years later and made an appeal for new managers based on cowboy grit and a swimming pool lifestyle. "Arizona was settled by men who dared to be different... and carved out a new life in their own frontier," said one of their promotional brochures. "If you are interested in not only a new way of personal life but a different concept of professional life, we would like to talk about specific opportunities for you at Hughes-Tucson." The company soon became the biggest technology employer in the state, with 15,000 people hired to build rockets and missiles. Though the selling of Tucson almost always involved promoting the cowboy image that had become a staple of American culture through dime novels and Western television dramas, there was actually a dearth of activity associated with ranches. As Lydia Otero has pointed out, the city was importing almost all of its chilled beef from Los Angeles or Phoenix packinghouses by the time of the automobile era, and U.S. Census data at the

time of the Second World War listed almost nobody who was employed in any sort of trade that involved cattle “with the possible exception of specialty souvenir and western apparel retailers.” The prototypical Tucsonan was no grizzled cowpuncher but rather a wealthy retiree who wasn’t interested in paying high taxes. The graying gentry were Tucson’s future, said one city official in 1966, because they “require no schools and few services.”

Abundant rounds of golf and tennis kept things lively on the weekends, and few lures turned out to be better for attracting bank landing like a big golf resort, which functioned as security in late-twentieth century Arizona much like fields of good clay loam had in 19<sup>th</sup> century Iowa. Townbuilding always requires a core commodity, and here, the tangible product was leisure and lifestyle. Jumbo-sized tract homes lined up around the fairways like bungalows at a boardwalk. Among the first of these, Skyline Country Club, was envisioned by its founders as a second-tier Palm Springs for bored Californians. Their estate was among the best, a plateau in the northernmost part of the foothills hard up against the saguaro-speckled wall of the Catalinas with a gorgeous view of the nighttime lights of the city below. Any *hoi polloi* from that city would face scrutiny from the 24-hour guard at the entrance road if they came up for a look. Those without an explicit invitation were barred. An official club summary of its history says with no irony: “John Bender and Leonard Savage were so enamored with the pristine site in 1959, they dreamed of a way to preserve and privatize it, making it permanently accessible to privileged residents, members and guests.”

That noble word – *dreaming* – invariably shows up in the origin stories of the mega-golf resorts, as though importing non-native grass and erecting casitas for high-income visitors, and keeping out the riff-raff, elevates a successful business plan into a deed of valor. A floor-covering distributor named Lou Landon had come out from Chicago the previous year and found a ranch for sale in bottomlands of the Canada del Oro – “valley of gold” -- a dirt drainage which flowed only in pounding rains. He hired the Maddox Construction Co. to come out and make what he called Oro Valley Country Club. Sam Nanini found his own cotton and alfalfa farm down the wash. He seeded the flatlands with Bermuda grass, bulldozed in some artificial

topography and hired Robert Bruce Harris to draw the new meadows of what would become Tucson National Golf Club, an island of emerald ringed with million-dollar homes. “Golf,” said Nanini, “will become one of America’s most popular participating sports because deep within everyone there’s a desire to excel in some way and golf provides that opportunity.” A publicity photograph showed Harris in the midst of bulldozed land, holding a roll of blueprints and pointing off in the distance. Sam Nanini stands awkwardly next to him in a porkpie hat, his face utterly blank, his eyes as flat as glass.

The northwest side of Tucson mushroomed up like this along the spine of Oracle Road -- an archipelago of leisure communities, golf resorts, family starter homes and second homes on the choicest hilltops for the absentee wealthy; sandwiched between them, the fake-arched retail plazas with their chain supermarket anchors, gas stations with flanks of pump islands and occasional mobile home warrens with false escutcheons and lattice-board and flowerpots covering up the sun-cracked wheels. “It’s been crazy,” recalled Sam Nanini’s barber, Tom Blakeman. “When the country clubs were built out here, it was destined to grow.” The seat of government was fifteen miles away at the Pima County Courthouse, where a three-man bloc of supervisors empathetic to the homebuilders guaranteed that the planning codes were weak sauce, commercial rezonings would always go smoothly and anything that looked like annexation would be stomped like a tarantula. Property taxes were rock-bottom. So were services. The sheriff did patrols, the fire trucks would come if you called, but that was about it. Water came dispensed from private companies. The schools were reliably mediocre and housed in Modernist huts. The nearest library or park was down in Tucson, whose downtown was steadily becoming a shabby husk of half-emptied office plinths. The big department stores – Jacomes, Steinfelds and the rest -- had left for the air-conditioned indoor suburban malls, the first of which, El Con, had been built on the chipped remains of the vanquished El Conquistador resort, a victim of bankruptcy. Only its water tower remained. Its garish turquoise dome was trucked up to Nick Gemematas’ new shopping strip mall off Oracle Road, Casa Blanca Plaza, where it was hoisted atop the new

retail village as a kind of trophy wrenched from an older Tucson that had been just as caught up in an architectural fantasy.

One of the only forces that attempted to stitch the northwest Tucson into a coherent village, or at least the pantomime of one, was a weekly newspaper called *The Territorial*, which took its name from a television program. “We had picked out all kinds of names for our paper and had just about settled on The Times,” said the founding publisher, Ed Jewett. “But this old printer was nuts about a weekly television Western called ‘Tombstone Territory’ and suggested that we ought to use the word territory somewhere in our title. I thought, well, this used to be a territory, so why not call it the Arizona Territorial?” To the side of its stylized Old West serif nameplate, the paper billed itself as *Servicing the Catalina Foothills, Casas Adobes and Country Club areas*, a motto that revealed perhaps more than the publisher intended. He had come out to Tucson as an Air Force public relations man in the early 1960s to ease the city’s jitters about being at the center of a ring of Titan II nuclear missile silos and thusly an attractive target for the Soviets first launching. The newspaper came with a lot of photos of new houses, profiles of residents at play and coverage of rezonings.

Ed Jewett’s son, Jack, sold most of the ads for the *Territorial* and he went on to get a law degree, serve three terms in the state legislature and is now president of the Flinn Foundation, which supports biotechnical research. When I met him in his office recently, I asked him what effect the *Territorial* may have had on making northwest Tucson a more interconnected place.

“Well, it wasn’t a true community,” he said flatly. “It was a place designed by developers. There was no real glue that held it together, no central character, and we tried to force it. For me, what was real about the place were just a few traditions. There was an annual pancake breakfast, for example. A Kiwanis Club. There was one center – the Casas Adobes center, where there was a flower shop, the Coat of Arms restaurant, the local Food Giant. That was kind of the glue.”

The northwest side of Tucson was an expression of the old American yearning for liberty, but it did not at all reflect the American tradition of an interdependent community. As James Howard Kunstler has observed, community *is* the economy – one never happens without the other. And in a geography where the economy was footed almost entirely on the values of privacy and the leisurely enjoyment of wealth, one could hardly expect an interconnected mass of people who cared about each other to spring up as if by magic. The deep structures that would have encouraged it simply weren't there. Genuine moments of shared purpose happened on rare occasions, and usually by accident and chance. For the unmotivated, it rarely gelled. For those who sought it, there was more effort than usual required, given the lack of physical commons. The national virtue of “togetherness” was never drawn into the design. There was a distinct divide in between The Foothills with its curving empty streets and the grid of straight angles in the valley euphemistically called “the inner city.”

Empty land had been a blessing to Nanini and it made attractive bait for those who themselves wanted to make a monument to their own work and leisure, yet the acreage also functioned as a curse because it encouraged people to follow the impulse of personal retreat rather than engagement. Developers had negotiated settlements with the county to occasionally provide some land for an elementary school, or pay an “impact fee,” but there was no thought given to the interconnectivity of all the neighborhoods that had been bladed overnight out of the desert scrub. The open spaces that the newcomers had sought pulled them apart, catering to and giving physical shape to their worst impulse of spiritual retreat, even as the northern reaches of Tucson functioned as a perfect dealer's showcase of individualism: one's own lot, own building envelope and property perimeters, one's own interpretation of a carefree Arizona life. The purpose for most shared public spaces was not parks or sidewalks but roadways, a place for moving cars from house to market and back.

In this comfortable remove from the reality of the valley, it would have been difficult to formulate a more certain prescription for systematic loneliness. People with nothing but time on their hands began to

make trips to the ABCO and the Food Giant just to see other people. “Now American supermarkets are not designed to function like Parisian cafes,” wrote James Howard Kunstler. “There is no seating, no table service. They do not encourage customers to linger. Yet some shopper will spend as much time as their dignity affords haunting the supermarket aisles because it is practically the only place where they can be in the public realm and engage in some purposeful activity around other live human beings.”

Northwest Tucson kept spilling out, reaching around and in back of Pusch Peak, going further and further up Oracle Road into what had been virgin desert. Golf-and-house mazes larger and grander than anything Sam Nanini could have imagined sprung up out of the flatlands as Rancho Vistoso and Dove Mountain and Saddlebrooke, selling mostly to the middle-aged and the elderly. Golf was the enduring pilot fish for new development in Tucson. One economic study claimed it was responsible for at least six thousand full-time jobs in the state, with annual cash revenues higher than that of milk, cotton or farm-grown vegetables.

At the corner of Oracle and Ina where most of it had begun, the trust that controlled the old Nanini inheritance announced that it was demolishing the outdated Nanini Financial Center, blading the footprint clean and erecting a new supermarket plaza anchored by a Safeway.

The corner was vaguely cursed, though the car traffic was golden. The Tahiti Restaurant had burned down because of a greasefire in 1976. The glass atrium at the Nanini Financial Center was too large and weird-looking. Tenants had mostly stayed away and the occupancy rate was bad. The second-growth plaza would be called “La Toscana Village,” in celebration of Sam Nanini’s Italian background and a homage to the Mediterranean theme across the street at Casas Adobes Shopping Plaza. The county paved the parking lot in exchange for the re-routing of a wash. But grandson Steve Nanini wasn’t pleased with the first blueprints. The squat towers of the new grocery were too garish, “a Disneyland front,” he thought. “I was going to do the deal,” he told me, “but got disenchanted with doing a strip center of that nature.”



Ownership soon passed to CSY Investments of Roseville, California, which was a front for a 30-year-old Hong Kong multi-millionaire named Chee S. Yaw whose fortune had come from clear-cut lumber harvesting all over Malaysia. The Chinese takeover of the British outpost of Hong Kong was looming, and the wealthy feared the new government was going to seize their assets. They dumped liquidity into whatever Canadian or American real estate looked promising, and Tucson offered up a land banquet.

One of these properties was La Toscana Village, in front of which at least sixty thousand cars were passing each day, according to private estimates. Yaw hired a Tucson developer named Andy Kelly to head the project, and Kelly didn't disappoint. Nanini had already sold building pads for a Safeway and a Walgreens that were – unfortunately – next to each other, which minimized the foot-traffic potential between the two. But Kelly was determined to do a total project instead of a bastardized project, and leased out a nail salon, a video store and a Chinese restaurant to fill out the appendage. “It was an easy shopping center,” he concluded. “I was proud of it.”

The firm of Gromtasky, Dupree and Associates from Dallas, Texas was hired to design the architecture, including the gray cast arches, mansard roof tiles and patio spaces with outdoor tables that gave the plaza a Tuscan dressing, though it was indisputably a grocery with a lakelike parking lot. The archways were designed to provide a lot of shade from the sun, keeping it directly off the plate glass of the front windows, and as a capturing space for breezes. “The geometry in the arches and the buildings is proud in its character,” the original architect, Kevin Morrow, told me when I called him up. “The mission was to develop a sense of place. It think it matured pretty nicely.” The shopping plaza officially opened for business in 1992.

People who lived nearby in Sam Nanini's original neighborhood were mostly pleased with the results, even those who were inclined to be cranky about the noise and traffic. Pete Vucoc, an activist with a house nearby who had successfully led an effort to keep a big Home Depot store away from another location, said La Toscana conformed with the philosophy of putting shopping plazas at major intersections rather than in the middle of long streets. That way, at least a remnant of node development might be preserved. “It was

very impressive and a lot of friendly support for it,” he said. “I never heard any criticism, and there was plenty of chances for that.”

The Tuscany theme might have been an accident of Nanini’s ancestral nostalgia, but it also happened to tap into a wildly popular design motif in the urban Arizona of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That section of north-central Italy – with its dewy associations of Lombardy poplars, crisp wines, rich royal patrons and their pet artists – is second only to Spanish Mission in the volume of its architectural quotation. The Scottsdale phone book features twenty different businesses with some version of Tuscan in their name, including restaurants, apartment complexes, subdivisions, a golf course, a nail salon and a day spa called Villa Toscana. There is a Tuscan Estate Homes and various Tuscan-style custom-built McMansions dotted here and there in the desert, with wrought iron balconies and spider-cracks deliberately chipped into the exterior walls for added *palazzo di pirro* credibility. The madness for the Tuscan vocabulary is closely linked with the image of “sun, hills, good food, warmth, friendliness, wine,” a branding expert told Jaimee Rose of *The Arizona Republic*. All the usual menu items, in other words, sought by internal American migrants in a mildly exotic place like Arizona where they could reconstruct a fresher, grander and more relaxed version of themselves in midlife, yet where the dollar is legal tender, the television programs are in English, horseradish is offered upon request and the traffic laws are unthreatening.

R. Brooks Jeffrey is the head of the Drachman Institute of the College of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at the University of Arizona. He told me that La Toscana Village is in sync with the local habit of what he calls “putting a dress on it,” that is, a conscious rejection of the native values and landscapes of Arizona in favor of an evocation of a disconnected place. “It really bothers me we have this inferiority complex about what we are. Do we need to associate ourselves with civilizations that are long gone? Our built environments should reflect the desert. This says that the way we naturally respond to this place is somehow inappropriate. This year it’s Tuscan. Next year, it’ll be something else.”

Every word of the name La Toscana Village is ironic and even insulting. Especially that last one – “village” – a word calculated to evoke warm notions of people coming together for a common purpose. There is a dioramic empathy embedded in this word -- a dog-whistle to the American collective unconscious which has always seen at its basic molecule a democratic New England village with a green and a chapel and a town hall, a government of the common person with everyone having a sense of participation. Very little of the constructed landscape in northwest Tucson resembles this idyll, or ever has.

“We have to go to the mall, which is a commercial environment, to have a community experience,” said Jeffrey. “How sad is that? They create ‘villages’ and ‘forums’ and ‘places’ to replace the real ones. These are savvy developers. They know what we want.”

This simulacrum of a “village,” then, a bad photocopy of an older America, was the true patrimony of the northwest side. Having lost a memory of the actual past, and in the liberty-seeking desire to escape one’s own confusing past, we had created a terra cotta horizon of an invented past, one with the most tenuous and wandering sense of what Tucson was actually supposed to be. “We had a pioneering spirit,” reflected Jack Jewett. “But how much of that community was real and how much did we try to force?”

Shops came and went from La Toscana Village and the traffic thickened on Oracle Road. The Blockbuster Video went under and a Beyond Bread sandwich shop took its place. Casas Adobes Flowers moved in from across the street. Geppetto’s failed and its shell went up for lease. The red bricks on the ersatz arches faded a bit in two decades of sunlight. Commerce was transacted, box wine was drunk, hasty salad meals were digested, receipts were banked, managers quit and were replaced, old customers died in their sleep and went unseen without further explanation and life went on as it always had.

In January of 2007, Gabrielle Giffords, newly elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, picked Sam Nanini’s Casas Adboes Shopping Center, across the street from La Toscana Village, for the very first event where she set out to meet her constituents in a casual space, an event called “Congress On Your Corner.”