

# El Paso Connections



Ogle makes adjustments to his "Oglemobile" in 1978. (Photo courtesy of University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, El Paso Herald-Post records)

up 60,000 miles powered by the system, getting more than 100 miles to the gallon. This early success motivated Ogle to seek help in further developing his invention which omitted the carburetor and the fuel pump and replaced them with a complicated system of hoses and filters.

Ogle met El Paso businessman James Peck, then owner of Peck's Automotive Service in Northeast El Paso. Peck granted Ogle access to his shop and provided the necessary equipment for Ogle's vaporized fuel system experiments, including a 1970 Ford Galaxie.

On April 30, 1977, a *Times* reporter, the young inventor and his assistant drove the experimental car equipped with the vaporized fuel system to Deming, N.M. The goal: to prove that with his system, a car could travel 200 miles on just two gallons of gas. On that Saturday, the 24-year-old did just that.

In an article entitled "Ogle Fuel System — No Hoax," Jones wrote that before the test drive, "reporters and onlookers witnessed a mechanic at Peck's empty the special, pressurized gas tank, and pour two gallons of fuel into the tank after it was empty." The car was also inspected for any hidden fuel but none was found. The inventor had succeeded in taking the 1970 Ford Galaxie, weighing almost 5,000 pounds, on a 205-mile drive on two gallons of gas! The "Oglemobile," as it was dubbed, put Tom Ogle in the public eye.

On May 18, 1977, *The El Paso Journal* announced in the article "Ogle's Gas System Rejected by ERDA Expert, R.W. Hurn" by Burny A. Paca, that the young inventor would get no support from the governmental agency Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA) because Hurn reported that Ogle's system was "not practical."

Despite Hurn's report, Ogle continued his research and testing with confidence. Meanwhile, critics consistently surfaced. Robert Levy, an unemployed El Pasoan with a Ph.D. in physics, challenged Ogle based on the laws of thermodynamics. However, two engineers in the mechanical engineering department

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## Ambrose Bierce, Writer

By Robert Yarbrough

One of the most famous American disappearances, as noted by *Time* magazine, concerns the American author Ambrose Bierce, an author of exceeding popularity between 1880 and 1910. Bierce supposedly disappeared into Mexico and the Mexican Revolution during the end of 1913 or the beginning of 1914. According to the experts writing his biography after his disappearance, he was last seen in the United States in El Paso, Texas.

He was born in a log cabin in rural Ohio (he would later describe his parents as "unwashed savages"). At the age of 15, he became a printer's apprentice on a small newspaper. He enlisted in the Union Army very early in the Civil War and was quickly promoted to the rank of lieutenant. His experiences in the Civil War would later provide material for his many war and horror stories. According to various sources, he eventually became either a captain or a major in the army.

The army sent him to the West on a military assignment, and he remained in San Francisco. There he started writing for various newspapers, including William Randolph Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner*. During his career as a writer, many considered him to be a master of the English language.

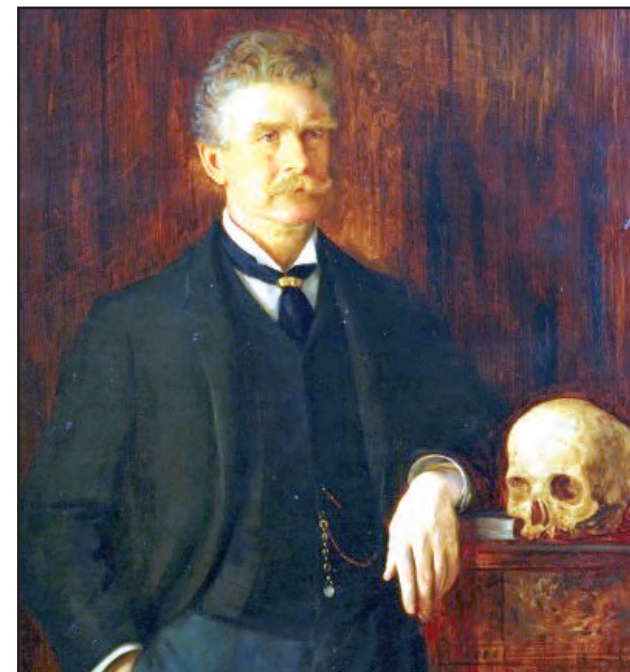
Ambrose Bierce was one of the most famous journalists of the 1800s, a short story writer of war and other horror stories, a literary critic, and a bitter cynic and misanthropist. He kept a human skull and a cigar box of (supposedly) an enemy's ashes on his desk. His contemporaries named him Bitter Bierce with his constant motto, "Nothing matters." He wrote the often anthologized short story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." He also wrote the well-known book *The Devil's Dictionary*, the entries for some of which were accompanied by humorous pseudonyms. His definition for DEAD, adj., reads:

Done with the work of breathing; done  
With all the world; the mad race run  
Though to the end; the golden goal  
Attained and found to be a hole!  
—Squatol Johnes

Many movies came from both Bierce's stories and his life. Several versions of "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" were produced, a French version winning both an award from the Cannes Film Festival and an Academy Award and later appearing in the United States as an episode of *Twilight Zone*.

Several more of his stories became short videos. Bierce himself also provided the principal character of two movies set in Mexico — Carlos Fuentes' *Old Gringo* and Robert Rodriguez's *From Dusk till Dawn 3: The Hangman's Daughter*.

Bierce left several clues behind as to his plans to disappear in Mexico. "Good-bye — if you hear of my being stood up against a Mexican stone wall and shot to rags please know that I think that a pretty good way to depart this life. It beats old age, disease, or falling down the cellar stairs," he wrote in a letter to his niece Lora. A close associate of Bierce reportedly received a letter with a postmark from Ciudad Chihuahua, Mexico. The letter stated, "As to me, I leave here tomorrow for an unknown destination."



Ambrose Bierce disappeared during the Mexican Revolution. (File image)

Nobody ever received any communication from Bierce after that. In 1914, the U. S. State Department searched for Bierce in Mexico. Several articles appeared in American newspapers about Bierce being executed by firing squad in Mexico, but a body was never found.

Eventually, theories grew about Ambrose Bierce. One article in a newspaper placed him in France fighting for the Allies. There was the story of Bierce and a crystal skull. Another story placed him in a South American jungle dressed in animal skins. The possibility of alien abduction was mentioned. Some Bierce biographers suggested a more practical way to disappear — suicide.

Various writers soon after Bierce's disappearance and even into contemporary times have linked Bierce and El Paso, Texas. Most of the accounts of Bierce's disappearance mention El Paso. According to the experts nearly a century ago, El Paso was Bierce's departure place for Mexico and the Mexican Revolution.

Carrey McWilliams wrote in *Ambrose Bierce: A Biography*, "He proceeded on to El Paso and passed across the line into Juárez." Paul Fatout, a Bierce scholar of the 1950s, noted, "Later in November the traveler moved on to El Paso, where international relations were so friendly that crossing the border was relatively simple." Richard O'Connor stated in his Ambrose Bierce biography, "Late in November he finally crossed the border at Ciudad Juárez, across from El Paso." Roy Morris, in his Bierce biography *Alone in Bad Company*, observed:

Bierce's statement to the journalists in El Paso, however, is entirely consistent with his characteristic doublespeak throughout his Mexican venture. First he announces that he is going into Mexico, then he qualifies his statement with an ominous reference to his likely fate. When he told the porch sitters at El Paso that he was either going to join Villa's army or else crawl off into the mountains and die, he might well have been telling them the truth.

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**Harvey Girls continued from page 5**

patron might enjoy a huge breakfast of cereal or fruit, steak, eggs, and potatoes, and hotcakes with butter and syrup, along with pie and coffee — all for 50 cents! In later years, Harvey Houses in the Southwest added Mexican favorites such as huevos rancheros and enchiladas, all served by the famous Harvey Girls.

Harvey Girls were respected and admired in the community. Morris wrote that many of the women were part of local women's organizations and clubs. In addition, many Harvey Girls enjoyed getting dressed up to go out. They had nice clothes and others coveted their finery. Morris said Harvey Girls demanded respect from the gentlemen they dated because of the high moral character they were expected to uphold. The girls were "self-assured and poised," and being "treated politely" was expected, according to Ruby Douglas Kuntz, a former Harvey Girl Morris interviewed. Part of that respect was generated by Harvey who would not allow foul language around the girls.

Many of the girls who came from the East married after their contracts were up. There were many more eligible bachelors than single women looking for marriage out West. The standards upheld by the Harvey Girls made them even more attractive candidates.

Although male employees were not permitted to date the staff, Tester said "as many as 20,000 Harvey Girls married prominent ranchers, cowboys, miners, merchants" and railroad employees from engineers to station agents, and attorneys and salesmen, men in almost all walks of life in the West. Of the couples who married, it was rumored that more than "four thousand boys born to these couples were named Fred, or Harvey, or both," according to Foster and Weiglin. A popular MGM musical, starring Judy Garland and Angela Lansbury, was made in 1946 that showed the life of the Harvey Girls.

Prince McKenzie, director of the Railroad and Transportation Museum of El Paso, said in an interview that after working as Harvey Girls, many young women decided to work in predominantly male-dominated jobs in retail shops. They already knew how to work with the public and had learned about finance, economics and grooming from their Harvey training. They fared well when it came time to find other jobs. Many even went into their own business after being Harvey Girls. McKenzie said that their training as Harvey Girls left them "capable of advancing," a type of job security.

After more than a decade of being ill and not knowing what was wrong, Fred Harvey died in 1901 from what was believed to be colon cancer, wrote Fried. Fred Harvey had two sons, Ford and Byron, who ran the business after their father died. Various grandchildren also worked in the business. Fried said that Fred Harvey's will requested that the business be run the same for 10 years after his death. No disbursements were to be made to anyone in the family, and his son Ford was to continue to run the business as his father had. The elder Harvey would have been gratified to see that even 50 years after his death, the business was still basically run the way it was when he was alive.

Along with the Santa Fe Railroad as a partner, Fred Harvey and his progenitors ran the "most famous and successful restaurant and hotel chain in America," according to Foster and Weiglin. Of note is that his empire was incorporated simply as "Fred Harvey" without accompanying tags such as Inc., Company, Sons and so on, perpetuating the illusion that he was still at the helm many decades after his death.

The El Paso Harvey House was in existence from March 1906 until 1948. It was located inside the Union Depot Station. The El Paso Harvey House had not only a spacious lunch counter, but it also housed a fine dining room inside the depot. Clarke Garnsey, author of an article in the journal *Password*, stated that the Harvey House was awarded space inside the Union Depot in September 1905, with the "Harveys assum[ing] responsibility for decorating and furnishing the room." The Harvey House was not ready for dining by the dedication date of the Depot, but it was ready for dancing.

Harriot Howze Jones wrote in *Password* that the El Paso Harvey House was a great place for a man to take his date. She mentioned that it served "fancy things like raw oysters and artichokes and lobster."

Deen Underwood, treasurer for the local Harvey Girls Association, interviewed former Harvey Girl Lilia Mendez Medina. Underwood said that Medina served as a Harvey Girl in 1944. She had a sister named Bertha Mendez who served as a bus girl in the 1940s. Medina's favorite customers were the Price family of the local dairy because they always left generous tips. She enjoyed working with the other girls but was scared of the matron and the cook, who was meticulous. Mendez Medina also mentioned that she could not fraternize with the customers and she always had to look busy. Her favorite dessert was the banana crème pie and she said she was also fond of the shrimp cocktail sauce.

Underwood noted that one thing of particular importance about the El Paso Harvey House is the fact that many of the girls were local. In the 1940s during World War II, trains often would slow down and the girls would hand box lunches through the windows. Traveling railroaders as well as upper class gentlemen ate at the local Harvey House, wrote Ann Carroll in the *El Paso Herald-Post*.

Pres Dehrkoop, historian for the El Paso Harvey Girls Association, pointed out in an interview with this author that the uniform worn in El Paso was white, unlike the other uniforms throughout the country that were mostly black with a white pinafore. Even more telling is that photos of Harvey Girls in the 1940s show both Hispanic and African-American women working at the local Harvey House. This was a rare occurrence since mostly white women were hired to work in the Harvey Houses. Most exceptions occurred in New Mexico and Arizona.

We do not know a lot about our El Paso Harvey House restaurant, but much is still being discovered. For instance, despite what some researchers have previously written, this author found in her research that the local Harvey House was located on the first floor of the Union Depot and not the second floor. A visit to the present day Union Depot makes it apparent that there was no room on the second floor for a dining room or lunch counter. In addition, there is no way that dancing at the opening of the Union Depot could have taken place on the second floor. The architectural plan shows that the second floor had offices for the railroad. Today, administrative offices exist in the place of the dining room and lunch counter.

The Indian shop and newsstand have been replaced by the Amtrak ticket counter, and the barber shop has been replaced by an office. Fred Harvey, along with architect Mary Colter, who designed the interior of many of his hotels, did much to promote Native American arts and was the first to open shops at many Southwestern train depots, displaying jewelry, rugs, pottery and other crafts by Southwestern tribes.

The El Paso Harvey House closed in 1948 after World War II, one of the contributors to the demise

of the Harvey empire. The Depression, the increase in automobile travel and freeways, the rise of airplane travel and the decline of passenger trains were other factors. However, some restaurants and hotels prevailed into the 1960s and beyond. Many El Pasoans would recognize two of the most renowned Harvey establishments still doing business, although not by Fred Harvey: the La Fonda hotel and restaurant in Santa Fe and El Tovar, the gem of several housing choices once run by Harvey inside the south rim of the Grand Canyon, a luxurious hotel where one has to make reservations up to a year or more in advance.

Once upon a time, there were Harvey establishments from northern New Mexico to El Paso, including hotels and/or lunch and dining rooms in Raton, Las Vegas, Lamy, Santa Fe, Wallace, Carlsbad, Clovis, Vaughn, Gallup, Belen, Albuquerque, San Marcial, Rincon, Deming and El Paso.

It was difficult to find information on local Harvey Girls. However, knowing that the "Harvey Way" prevailed at every one of Fred Harvey's establishments provides us knowledge of the El Paso restaurant as well. The Harvey Girls Association of El Paso is an organization that meets monthly to promote and preserve the history of the Harvey Girls locally. Their meetings are held at the train depot. Those interested may contact Pres Dehrkoop at 751-3631 or [presdehr@elp.rr.com](mailto:presdehr@elp.rr.com) for more information. 📧

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Walter Neale in his 1929 biography *Life of Ambrose Bierce* stated, "His last letters to me were written in December 1913. He first wrote from Galveston; next from San Antonio, and a few days later from Laredo, Texas." He continued, "I know he greatly desired to visit both Eagle Pass and El Paso."

One of the last famous authors to write of this unsolved disappearance was Carlos Fuentes of Mexico, who found the story of Bierce's disappearance to be very appealing. Fuentes wrote in his novel *The Old Gringo*, "He [Bierce] got off the train in El Paso, carrying his folding black suitcase, what they called a Gladstone then, and dressed all in black except for the white expanse of cuffs and shirtfront."

One hundred years later, nothing more is known about the final story of Bierce than was known immediately after he vanished. Many scholars and investigators over the century have found nothing conclusive about his disappearance. It appears that this mystery will never be solved definitively. And to this day, nobody has found any conclusive evidence that Ambrose Bierce ever visited El Paso, Texas. Even though one of the biographers mentioned that Bierce had spoken with some El Paso journalists, there does not seem to be any mention of Ambrose Bierce being in El Paso in the local papers of the late months of 1913.

Did the connection between El Paso and Ambrose Bierce ever exist? The biographers during the first half of the 20th century thought so. Like much of the famous disappearance story a century ago, nothing will probably be proved. After a century, the case has grown very cold. Still, fans are observing the 100th anniversary of his disappearance.

A last note: Some of Bierce's biographers mentioned suicide. Is his sun bleached skeleton along with a rusty pistol yet to be found somewhere in the canyons of the Franklin Mountains? 🐉

Editor's note: Yarbrough is a professor of English at EPCC's Mission Del Paso's Campus.