

Dan Thorne: Whiskey Row Success Story

By Thomas P. Collins

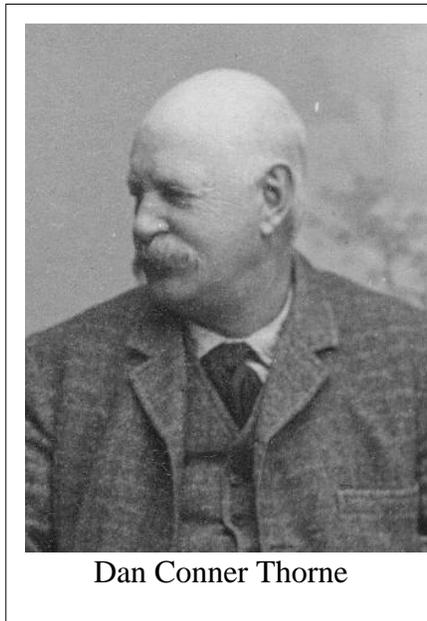
Prescott in its earliest days was literally a place of golden opportunities both for miners and mine investors—and for those who provided them with essential goods and services such as food, drink and gambling in return for their gold. Dan Connor Thorne was one of those who made the most of these opportunities both as a mine investor and provider of pleasures.

In a relatively short time after arriving in Prescott in 1867 he was well established and was, as Lilly Frémont noted in her diary, “making money fast from the Silver Belt Mine,” while “he keeps the chief faro & gambling place in the village [the Cabinet Saloon on Whiskey Row], but is nevertheless a good citizen.”ⁱ

A New Yorker likely born in June 1829,ⁱⁱ he came west after news of the discovery of gold at Sutter’s Creek in California reached the Atlantic Coast. According to the census records dated September 26, 1850, of Sutter County, California Territory, Daniel Connor Thorne resided in Auburn and Vicinity at “Dwelling House # 824”—a lodge, shack, or tent—on the gold diggings, about 35 miles northeast of Sutter’s Fort near Sacramento.

After the California Gold Rush passed its peak, Dan followed placer mining along the Snake River in the Idaho Territory before coming to Prescott. By then a forty-year-old widower,ⁱⁱⁱ Dan was starting a new life in a town where some men became millionaires within ten years. Dan’s son, D.C. Thorne Jr.,

later claimed that his father “had the distinction of opening in 1868 the famous Palace



Dan Conner Thorne

Bar, where the present Palace now stands on Whiskey Row.”^{iv} If this was true, the bar certainly wasn’t the imposing edifice that graces the center of the block today since it would not have occupied more than one 25-foot wide lot.^v

On Christmas Day 1869 Dan pocketed the stakes along with John H. Behan in a Prescott pigeon-shooting contest just before he journeyed to New York for a family visit.^{vi} He had “told the boys that he meant to commit matrimony, but they didn’t believe him.”^{vii} On the trip he met Mary Anna Wilson, a native of New Jersey and they married on February 28, 1870, in Manhattan. Dan set off at once alone for the Arizona Territory. By June Dan was having a \$2,000 residence built on N. Montezuma Street in Prescott for his new bride.^{viii}

Upon Mary Anna’s arrival in Prescott that October, Dan was 41 and she was 20. Prescott itself was only six years old: a dusty little mining village with a population of about 675. The huge Plaza stood empty—the beau-

tiful old Yavapai County Court House was not erected until 1878—and except for the stately Diana Saloon on the southwest corner of Gurley and Montezuma streets, the hastily thrown-up wooden buildings and the unpaved streets must have looked very crude indeed to the well-bred young bride. But she adapted quickly and Dan busied himself in the Bradshaw Mountains, speculating for silver and gold. We read little of the Thornes in the newspapers of the early 1870s, which gives the impression that Dan was not prominent in Prescott society. But he partnered with a merchant named Cassidy and quietly went about investing in the mining industry. Thorne and various partners purchased sections of the May Flower Lode, the White Picacho Lode, and the New Era Lode, as well as land in the Tiger District.

The Thornes soon had two children: Stephen Wilson (b. 1872, Prescott) and Daniel Connor, Jr. (b. 1874, Prescott). While Stephen thrived, Dan Jr. contracted polio, leaving him with one leg shorter than the other. Luckily both boys survived the scarlet fever epidemic of February 1875, which broke out at Fort Whipple and spread to the town.

Dan and his partner William W. Hutchinson reportedly ran a cock-fighting arena on Lot 19 of Montezuma St. in early 1874.^{ix} If so, it had a short run since Dan and William began construction of a large frame building on that lot in April. The *Miner* of July 10, 1874, announced that the proprietors had opened a “new resort,” The Cabinet, which “has ever since attracted great crowds.” There they displayed mineral specimens and published ads inviting prospectors to bring in valuable specimens for which they would pay cash. This “resort” was a fine-looking saloon.

So successful was business that on December 9, 1875, Thorne purchased Lots 19-20, on which the Cabinet (and possibly an early ver-

sion of the Palace Bar) stood. Hutchinson and Thorne immediately sold Lot 20 to Henry Asher and partners on December 10. The proceeds from this and the mining investments provided the capital for Thorne and his partners to invest in the Tip Top and Cross Cut Lodes in July 1876. Mary Anna bore Dan another son: Harry Ashley (b. June 1877, Brooklyn, N.Y.). Apparently she chose to give birth in New York because she did not trust the local doctors. She left Prescott in April 1876 to join her family in New York. Dan accompanied her only as far as Ehrenberg. He eventually joined her in New York, visiting friends and relatives.

A frightening accident occurred at the outset of the journey east. Dan Jr. was only two years old, so he didn’t remember it well, but his father regaled the family with the story repeatedly in later years. Father, mother, and the two sons took the stagecoach to Ehrenberg, where Mary Anna and the boys would catch the boat on the Colorado River to Yuma, then another stage to California, where they would take the train East. The near-death experience burned the memory of that journey into the minds of the family forever.

The *Arizona Weekly Miner* (April 7, 1876) carried the story. “The Arizona and New Mexico stage which left here at 4 P.M. yesterday with seven passengers met with an accident a short distance beyond the 12-mile station, by which Mrs. D.C. Thorne and her youngest child were hurt, but as we understand not seriously. It seemed that two men suddenly appeared at a turn in the road, which frightened the leaders and caused them to turn the coach over. Mrs. Sheriff Bowers was also in the coach with her three children but all escaped unhurt except Mrs. Thorne and her child. Mr. Thorne, who was accompanying his wife as far as Wickenburg, on her way to visit friends in the East, was holding their oldest boy, and when he found the coach

going over threw him out into the sand on the upper side and he escaped without injury.”

The family story of later years confused the stagecoach accident of 1876 with his father’s tale of a stage robbery that occurred on September 27, 1877, when Dan Sr. was on his way to California. Thorne was riding shotgun, which he described as the best seat on the coach. Inside sat Ed Peck of the Peck Mine fame, his wife, children, and aged parents, and another passenger named Gus Ellis. Peck was carrying a huge sum of money. Eight miles west of Antelope Station, a masked gunman—later identified as the infamous “Brazen Bill” Brazelton—held up the stage. He commanded the driver to stop, get down from the box and hold the leaders by the bits. Next he ordered Dan Thorne to throw out the express box and break it open with an axe, which the robber himself supplied. According to Dan Thorne, a gust of wind blew the bandana from Brazen Bill’s face, as Thorne was looking straight at him. Brazelton hastily pulled the kerchief back on his face and remarked that he would have to kill Thorne, since he could recognize him. He asked the driver if the horses would “stand fire.” The driver replied they might but that there were women and children inside. The holdup man changed his mind and rode away with the Wells Fargo box. He failed to search the passengers and Peck’s fortune remained safe.^x

Not long after his return home, Thorne was standing at the end of the Palace bar, facing the swinging doors. A customer entered the saloon, and Dan recognized him at once as the holdup man, who also recognized him. The felon turned around and left without a word. In relating this story in later years, Thorne remarked, “he didn’t need to do that. He spared my life and didn’t even rob me; I would have showed him the time of his life

and the drinks would have been on the house.”^{xi}

An amusing story appeared in the *Miner* in August 1877 regarding Dan’s adoption of a bear cub. “Mr. D.C. Thorne has come into possession of a nice little pet in the shape of a cub bear, of the Cinnamon specie. Dan has got the trick now wherewith to keep order in his usually well-regulated establishment. Should one or more of the billigerents [*sic*] become hostile and try to ‘take the town’ young bruin will be turned loose, and if not able to command the peace, will at least be able to ‘clean out’ the crowd.”^{xii} This suggests that Dan kept the cub in the Cabinet as an attraction. In another family anecdote a brash young man rode his horse directly into the Palace Bar one day. Dan Thorne stopped him, straightened him out, and hired him to work in his bar. These stories offer insight into Dan’s whimsical disposition.

In the meantime, Dan was growing rich with his new mining investments. With various partners, he purchased 500 feet of the Silver Belt Lode on December 26, 1874. On July 25, 1876, he and his partners bought 375 feet of the Tip-Top and Cross Cut Lodes. He and C.F. Cate purchased from J.W. Swilling a one half interest in the Swilling mine, for one thousand dollars cash, in July 1877. It was one of the most valuable bonanzas, in terms of richness and extent, equal to the Tip-Top and the Peck in the Peck and Humbug districts. In September 1877 Dan acquired all interest in the Silver Belt Mine.

Dan’s wife and sons journeyed back West from New York in November 1877, but Dan was compelled to leave them in San Francisco for the winter, according to the November 30 *Miner*, “on account of his three beautiful children being stricken down with scarlet fever. Mr. T. has received several telegrams since leaving the city, from Mrs. Thorne, that

the children were convalescent, and no fears were entertained as to their speedy recovery.”

Mary Anna returned to Prescott with her boys in the spring of 1878, and in January 1880 she delivered a daughter, Mary Anna. The baby was only 16 days old on February 4, 1880, when her mother died of childbirth complications. The obituary extolled Mrs. Thorne as a woman of more than ordinary culture, noted for her amiability of temper and sweetness of disposition, whose “chief charm was her devotion to her family.”^{xiii} Mary Anna (“Annie”) blamed herself for her mother’s death all her life, although the infection that killed her may well have been caused by the doctor’s failure to wash his hands before delivery. One day in 1955, when she was seventy-five years old and sharing memories with grandchildren, she was asked what she knew of her

birth mother. She burst into tears and ran from the room, crying, “I killed my dear mother.”^{xiv} Three months after his wife’s death, Dan sold the family’s log home on Alarcon Street^{xv} and moved with his children to 301 Carleton Street. He adopted an eleven-year-old girl, Florence A. Carrigan, possibly to provide his infant daughter with a nanny.^{xvi}

After a suitable period of mourning, Dan plunged back into business. On December 10 *Miner* announced, “The Cabinet Saloon is receiving a thorough overhauling and will be opened up to the public on Monday next with a new management and on an improved style. Messrs. Thorne & Piercy will have the restaurant business under their care, and we venture the assertion that two more competent and popular gentlemen cannot be found for this particular business in the country.”



Cabinet Saloon Interior

In early 1881 Dan was stirred by the prospect of a railroad connecting Prescott with other cities in Arizona. There had been much debate over this subject. That February, Dan Thorne joined 45 prominent citizens in the incorporation of the Prescott & 35th Parallel Railroad Company, but years would pass before the first train roared into Prescott. The *Courier* of June 12, 1885, complained, “A railroad and quartz reduction works are badly needed in this part of Arizona.”

In July 1881 a year and a half after Mary Anna’s death, Dan married a young Texan named Ellen Josephine Bouyea, who kept a boarding house in Prescott with her sister Alice.^{xvii} Josephine proved to be healthy and strong, and their marriage lasted for 31 years. She reportedly bore him two sons, neither of whom survived infancy.

Shortly after his third marriage, Thorne and his partner Piercy leased the Exchange Saloon (west side of Montezuma St.), from C.F. Cate, renovated it, and renamed it the Cabinet Restaurant. It “threw open its doors,” according to the newspaper ad, on September 4, 1881. It was a European style restaurant, with “Everything the Market Affords constantly on hand.” Thorne and Piercy now owned two “Cabinet” establishments, both with fine cuisine. But Dan apparently tired of managing two such businesses at once. The *Miner* (Jan. 6, 1882) reported that the “Cabinet” club room, under the management of Bill Taylor, is now a picture of beauty, the walls of which have been decorated with handsome pictures.”

Family tradition has it that Dan loved gambling and owned a string of racehorses and



Cabinet Saloon Exterior

interest in a 150-acre racetrack. He filed articles of incorporation with five partners for the Prescott Driving Club in 1882 and was a founding member of the Prescott Jockey Club in 1874. Pools were sold at the Cabinet Saloon, and in June 1875 Dan and a Mr. Cook entered "Bay Jim" in a race against four other horses. Dan reportedly gambled away small fortunes at the poker table in his saloon: "money, land, property and mines." But his varied investments kept him afloat.

Always on the alert for ways to enhance his business, Dan took advantage of the demise of the local Prescott Dramatic Club in early 1882 and the consequent lack of theatrical entertainment. In August 1882 he filled the void by constructing a stage in the rear of the Cabinet Saloon. He hired singers, dancers, and actors to perform variety shows and packed the house nightly. In October 1882 the *Miner* announced that the Cabinet Minstrel Troupe had arrived to make amusement for the crowds who spent their evenings in the "ancient retreat." Editor Charles Beach noted that Dan "certainly deserves great credit for his indomitable energy and persistence." He touted Dan's periodic upgrades to the interior of his saloons and thanked him for the fine performances of Mr. and Mrs. Norton, Miss Birdie Hastings, and Mr. Nathan (an accomplished pianist) at the Cabinet. "Mr. Thorne is always to be found in the lead of that particular branch of business which he follows."^{xviii} That same year, in May, Dan became the exclusive owner of the Silver Prince Mine. He had become an amusement and mining magnate.

In April 1883 Dan sold Lot 19 with the Cabinet Saloon to Hugh McCrum of San Francisco for \$5,777.50. And none too soon! On the morning of July 5 a fire broke out in the restaurant department of the Cabinet and raged down Whiskey Row, destroying the original brick Palace bar, along with the Cabinet and

its principal rival, the Diana Saloon. According to the July 7 *Arizona Gazette*, "Volumes of smoke poured from the doors and windows and soon the flames were seen issuing not only from the roof of Thorne's, but from the eaves of the neighboring buildings so rapid was their progress." Ellis & Whitney's saloon, the Diana, had to be dynamited to prevent the flames from jumping across the street. The explosion was deemed "a complete success; instead of the building flying into the air and sending burning fragments all over the city, it settled quietly to the ground a mass of rubbish. Thus all danger in that direction was ended." McCrum's loss amounted to \$7,000. Dan also lost a building (probably the Cabinet Restaurant) and stock of goods valued at \$7,000. Not to be daunted, in 1885 Thorne and a new partner, Mr. Harrington, assumed management of the Eclipse Saloon (Lot 16) as well as the P & O Restaurant (Lot 15).

In early 1886 Dan and a partner, Peter L. Kastner, contracted Col. John G. Campbell to rebuild the Cabinet Saloon on Lot 21 of Whiskey Row. They paid Campbell \$500 in advance rent and signed a three-year lease on the lot. Construction moved slowly, and the partners complained to Campbell of the exposed, uninsulated, and unplastered north wall, which faced an empty lot. Campbell refused to finish it. Barely had the Cabinet opened on September 13 when Thorne and Kastner had a heated disagreement over the latter's errors in filling out checks. The indignant Kastner bought out Thorne on September 24, dissolving their partnership. But whatever their differences, they must have been forgotten when Kastner married Thorne's adopted daughter Florence in March 1887.

Still eager to invest in the lucrative businesses of Whiskey Row, Dan purchased the Palace Saloon and Chop House from Charles Morgan (April 1888). He opened it May 1, with

himself as manager of the saloon and Fong Murphy as “chief de cuisine of the chop house.”^{xix} He continued as sole manager until March 1891, when Mr. Smiley joined him as co-manager. It was a short-lived partnership. By May 13, W.A. Freeze had replaced Dan as co-manager and became sole proprietor in September 1892. Perhaps stressed by juggling too many projects, Dan decided to sell the saloon and devote all his time to his mining claims in the Congress District.

By 1897 Dan and Josephine were living in Maricopa County and visited Prescott infrequently. Dan was attending to his mining investments there: at least five well-developed claims, including the Gold Standard, the Rover group of quartz mines, and other claims rich in pyrite ores.^{xx} Still, the 1900 Census shows him living with his wife and Dan Jr. in Prescott as a mining operator. But by 1902 Dan and his wife had moved to New York City. Records of March 18, 1913, show the couple married 31 years, residing in an apartment house at 248 Sherman Avenue in Manhattan. He died of a heart attack at his residence on March 21, 1913.

While Dan Thorne’s participation in Prescott’s social and political life is not well documented, his obituary notes that he was “always in the front rank” of all public movements, “whether business or pleasure was the motive.” It also praises his generosity and his “many acts of benevolence.” As a politician, “he was sagacious and always triumphed in his cause, generally being with the Democratic party.”^{xxi} Daniel Connor Thorne’s lust for life, his perseverance and resilience in the face of calamity and tragic personal losses, and his intrepid entrepreneurship in the mining industry and saloon and restaurant businesses exemplify the Arizona Territory’s pioneering spirit.



End Notes

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- ⁱ Mary Lee Spence, ed., *The Arizona Diary of Lily Frémont, 1878-1881* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 144-145.
- ⁱⁱ Family records list his birth as 1827, however the 1870 Federal Census lists his age as 39 and his birth therefore about 1831 and the 1900 Federal Census specifies June 1829.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Dan apparently first married about 1847, but the bride’s name is unknown. Family tradition has it that “Mrs. D.C. Thorne” died on a journey to Oregon in a covered wagon. See Lorretta Curry’s family narrative on Ancestry.com for Mary Anna Wilson Thorne.
- ^{iv} See D.C. Thorne, Jr.’s narrative in the D.C. Thorne surname vertical file in the Sharlot Hall Museum Archives.
- ^v All of the lots on Whiskey Row were 25 feet wide and 150 feet deep.
- ^{vi} *Arizona Weekly Miner* (Jan. 1, 1870). Behan later gained notoriety as Cochise County, AZ, Sheriff at the time of the O.K. Corral shootout.
- ^{vii} *Arizona Weekly Miner* (April 2, 1870).
- ^{viii} *Arizona Weekly Miner* (June 18, 1870). Thorne purchased Lot 11 and one-half Lot 9, Block 7, on July 18, 1870.
- ^{ix} See Richard Gorby’s “Prescott’s Plaza: 1864-1900” in the Sharlot Hall Museum Archives. It is unclear where Gorby obtained this information. There are no ads or news items in the *Miner* for the Cock Pit.
- ^x See R. Michael Wilson, *Great Stagecoach Robberies of the Old West* (Connecticut: TwoDot, 2007), 84. The family’s version differs in some details: there are two outlaws, described as “amateurs.” See also the *Miner* (Oct. 5, 1877).
- ^{xi} See Lorretta Curry’s family narrative on Ancestry.com.
- ^{xii} August 24, 1877.
- ^{xiii} *Arizona Weekly Miner* (Feb. 1, 1880).
- ^{xiv} See Lorretta Curry’s family narrative on Ancestry.com.
- ^{xv} The Thornes sold their lot on N. Montezuma (Block 7) to Andrew L Moeller on March 2, 1876. They must have lived on Alarcon, then, from 1876 to 1880.
- ^{xvi} Florence was reportedly a “visitor from New York.” What happened to her parents remains unknown.
- ^{xvii} While the family history asserts that the Bouyea sisters may actually have been New Yorkers, the Federal Census records of 1880 and 1900 list Texas as their state of birth.
- ^{xviii} October 13, 1882.
- ^{xix} *Arizona Weekly Journal-Miner* (May 2, 1888).
- ^{xx} See the *Arizona Republican* (Feb. 25, 1896), p. 5, c. 3.
- ^{xxi} *Prescott Journal-Miner* (March 26, 1913).