



LEGENDS OF AMERICA

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Travel To ▼

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E-mail Us

Ghostly Legends ▼

Forums

More Travel Fun ▼

Site Map

Legends Home
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American History
Ghost Towns
Ghostly Legends
Historic People
Native Americans
Old West Legends
Outlaw Legends
Photo Galleries
Rocky Mtn Store
Route 66
Travel Destinations
Treasure Tales

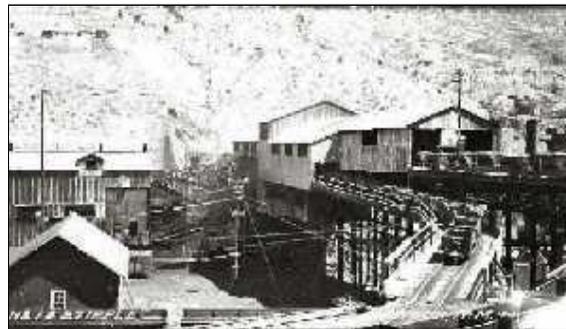


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Links
Site Map

Dawson, New Mexico

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<< [Previous](#) [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [Next](#) >>



[Dawson](#) Mine, 1920's, Dwight and Carol Myer Collection, NMSU

Amazingly, there no remains, other than the cemetery, of this once thriving community of over 9,000 residents. In 1950, the coal mining operation was shut down and the town was razed.

But tragedy hit [Dawson](#) again on February 8, 1923, at about 2:20 PM, in Stag Canyon Mine No. 1. When a mine train jumped its track, it hit the supporting timbers of the tunnel mouth, and ignited coal dust in the mine. There were 123 men in the mine at the time. Many women who lost husbands in the earlier disaster waited anxiously for their sons to appear out of the smoke. Early the next morning two miners who had been in an isolated section of the mine walked out. They were the only survivors. The cemetery was extended once again and more white crosses took their place in the cemetery.

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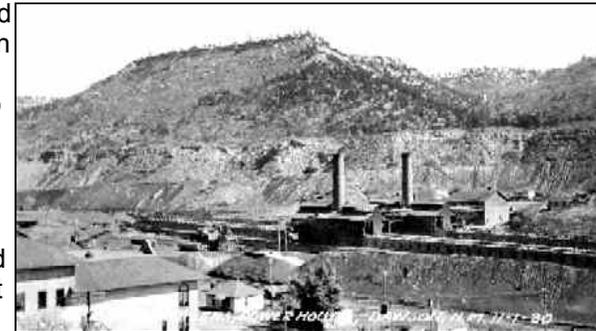


After the clean up, [Dawson](#) continued to thrive for almost three decades, with sons following their fathers into the mines. But gradually railroads began to convert to diesel-electric locomotives, while natural gas and heating oil replaced coal as the fuel to heat homes. There was a brief resurgence of mining during World War II, but after that, it was clear coal was a fuel of the past. On April 30, 1950 the mine was shut down. The announcement meant the death of the company town. Phelps Dodge sold the whole town, buildings and all, to a salvage company in Phoenix. The giant coal washer was shipped piece by piece to Kentucky and several houses were moved out and relocated. The company safe ended up in the Phelps Dodge headquarters in Bisbee, [Arizona](#), where it is still displayed at the mining museum. Over the next dozens of years, ranchers operating Phelps Dodge's "Diamond D" ranch occupied the few dwellings remaining.

Over 350 white iron crosses in the [Dawson](#) Cemetery mark the graves of those who perished in the mining disasters. The cemetery, a deeply moving site, is now the only part of [Dawson](#) still open to the visitor. These silent sentinels, some with individual names and some unmarked, are poignant reminders of the tragic deaths of the victims, and, more importantly, their lives.

For a while, [Dawson](#) had been truly forgotten by [New Mexico](#) until two brothers went on a metal detecting expedition in 1991. Dale and Lloyd Christian were shocked when they saw the uncared for and abandoned cemetery. When Dale Christian returned home to Albuquerque he petitioned the [New Mexico](#) State Historic Preservation Division to place the cemetery on the National Register of Historic Places.

The [New Mexico](#) Office of Cultural Affairs was unaware that the cemetery even existed and asked Christian to provide measurements of the site. Not only did he provide the measurements, but he also provided pictures and an accounting of the number of graves and pictures. The Office of Cultural Affairs was amazed and although very few cemeteries are placed on the National Register, the [Dawson](#) Cemetery was added on April 9, 1992.



[Dawson](#) Coke Ovens, 1920, Carol and Dwight Myer Collection, NMSU

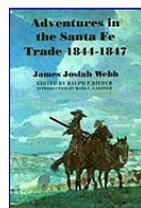
Now the site is again part of a working ranch, just as it was prior to 1901. Every two years former residents hold a picnic on the site of their former town on Labor Day weekend. And on Memorial Day, many visit the cemetery where their relatives still lie buried.

[Continued Next Page](#)

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<< [Previous](#) [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [Next](#) >>

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