

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

City of Benson

State Historic  
Preservation Office

Benson Historic Preservation  
Commission

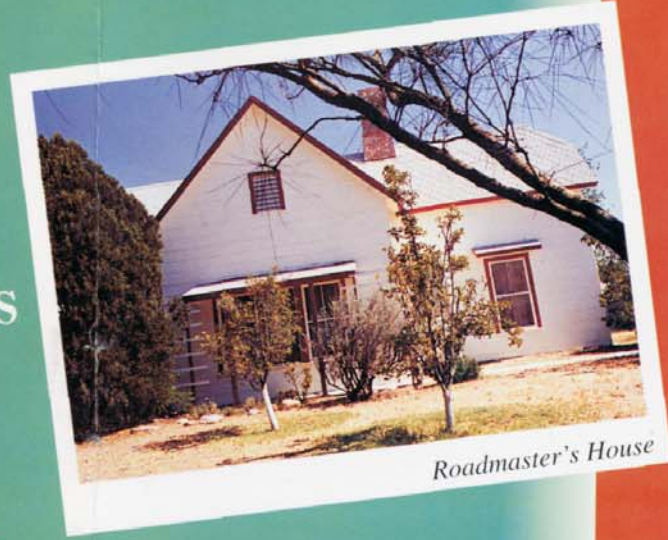
Johns & Strittmatter, Inc.,  
Historic Architects

Benson Chamber  
of Commerce

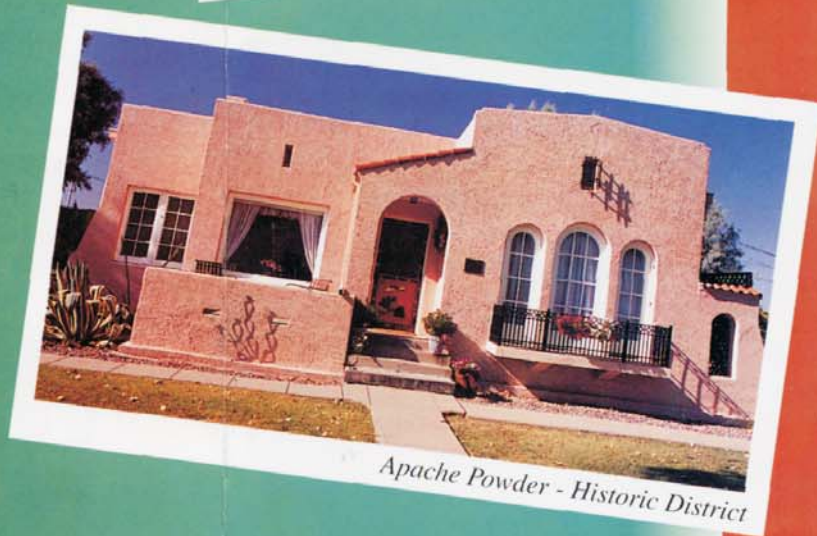
Arizona Office of Tourism



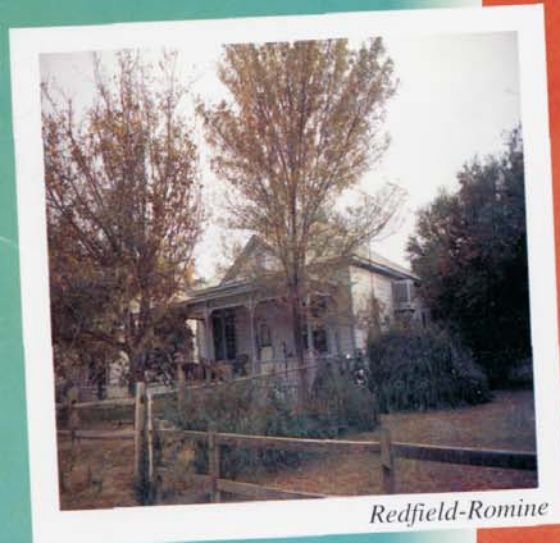
Autumn 1995



*Roadmaster's House*



*Apache Powder - Historic District*



*Redfield-Romine*

BENSON HISTORIC WALKING TOUR

# HISTORY OF BENSON

## A R I Z O N A

Welcome to Benson, Arizona, a lively trade and transportation center for southwestern Cochise County since 1880. At one time, stages rumbled into town loaded with passengers and silver bars from the Tombstone Mine. The Southern Pacific kept its huge turntable busy with railroad traffic. These days, however, Benson has become an active center for tourists.

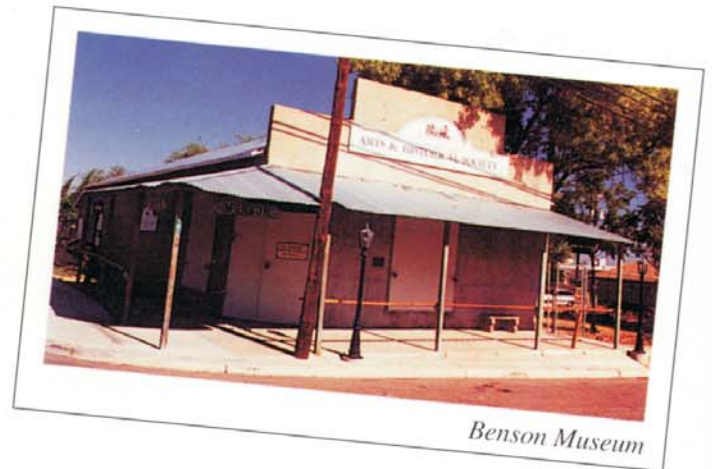
Coronado may have been the first visitor, passing by here in 1540. Perhaps he crossed the San Pedro River and headed up Tres Alamos Canyon en route to New Mexico in search of the fabled Golden Cities of Cibola. By 1657, a Spanish Colony flourished on this site. The Mormon Battalion on their transcontinental hike passed here in 1846. In 1857, the Overland Butterfield Stage was built at nearby Tres Alamos.

In 1880, William Ohnesorgen's stage was still operating when the Southern Pacific Railroad built east to Benson. It was the only town in the area with transcontinental connections. The railroad brought rapid growth, imported materials and more sophisticated architecture. Redwood, shipped by rail from California, contributed greatly to Benson's building boom.

The town experienced a temporary decline in 1910 when Southern Pacific redirected its major route to Tucson. In the 1920s it again became an important transportation junction point owing to improvements on Federal Route 80, the national highway from Washington D.C. to San Diego. Known as the "Broadway of America," Route 80 went through Benson's "Main Street," 4th Street today.

This walk through Benson's past will tell you a bit about the town's architecture and its people. We hope you will enjoy reminiscing with us.

S E E Map  
in Centerfold



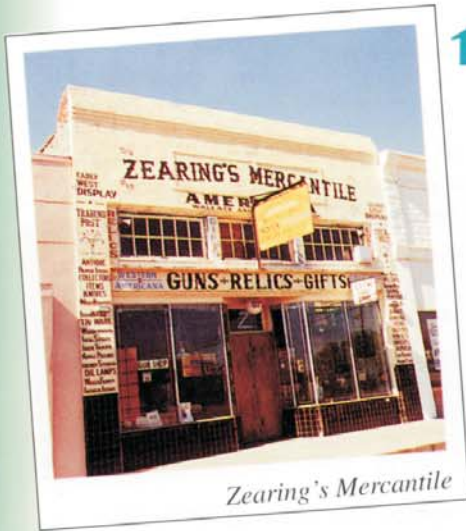
*Benson Museum*



This tour begins at the **Benson Museum**, on the corner of S. San Pedro and E. 5th Streets. Built in 1921 as the **W.D. Martinez General Merchandise Store**, this building served the largely Hispanic neighborhood to the east. William D. Martinez, born in Magdalena, Sonora, eventually sold the building to Albert Steinfeld, one of the most successful merchants of the West. Today, the building is the site of the San Pedro Valley Arts and Historical Society Museum with permanent and temporary displays relating to Benson's history and the arts. Listed on the National Register in 1994.



**The Goetz/C & W Building**, 301 E. 4th St., is a false-fronted commercial building sharing a common wall with its neighbor, similar to numerous examples which in the past lined "Main Streets" nationwide. Built before 1909 as a general merchandise store, it was one of several commercial structures situated along the south side of 4th Street in close proximity to the former railroad passenger and freight depot (see map). The store was owned by Charles Goetz, a prominent early Benson businessman.



*Zearing's Mercantile*

**3**

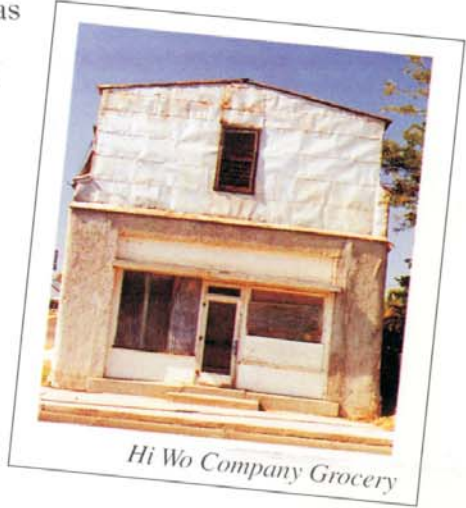
**Zearing's Mercantile**, 305 E. 4th St., was built before the turn of the century during Benson's railroad era. The commercial building has had several

owners, serving mainly as a general merchandise store. As **Max Treu Territorial Meat Co.**, it was used to supply meat to the mines. Listed on the National Register, the building has been restored and features a noteworthy interior.

**4**

The **Hi Wo Company Grocery**, 398 E. 4th St., stands as a reminder of the Chinese population which came to Benson when the railroads were built. It was one of Benson's first commercial buildings. Hi Wo, of Chinese descent, bought this building from Rogers Brothers in 1896. A general merchandise store, Hi Wo Company Grocery was operated continuously by Hi Wo and his family for nearly a century, from 1896 to 1989, and is still owned by his descendants. Hi Wo was

deeply respected in the community and carried many Benson citizens through the Depression.



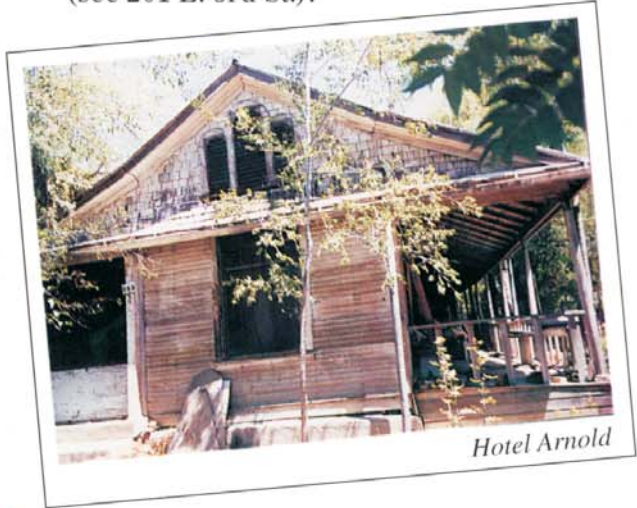
*Hi Wo Company Grocery*

**5**

The National Register-listed **Benson Railroad Historic District** is located just north of the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks on E. 3rd St. near the vacant site of the former freight and passenger depot (see Map). The District consists of ten residences and one hotel. These wood frame buildings are constructed of California redwood. The simplest structures in this District are vernacular frame dwellings such as the front-gabled "shotgun" example at 223 E. 3rd St.

**5a**

253 E. 3rd St., the Colonial Revival style **Hotel Arnold**, was built around 1879 by retired engineer and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Arnold A. McGinnis, to accommodate railroad employees, passengers, commercial travelers and salespeople. Around the turn of the century, the Colonial Revival Style was very popular in southeastern Arizona. Residences were often square in plan with pyramidal roofs (see 201 E. 3rd St.).

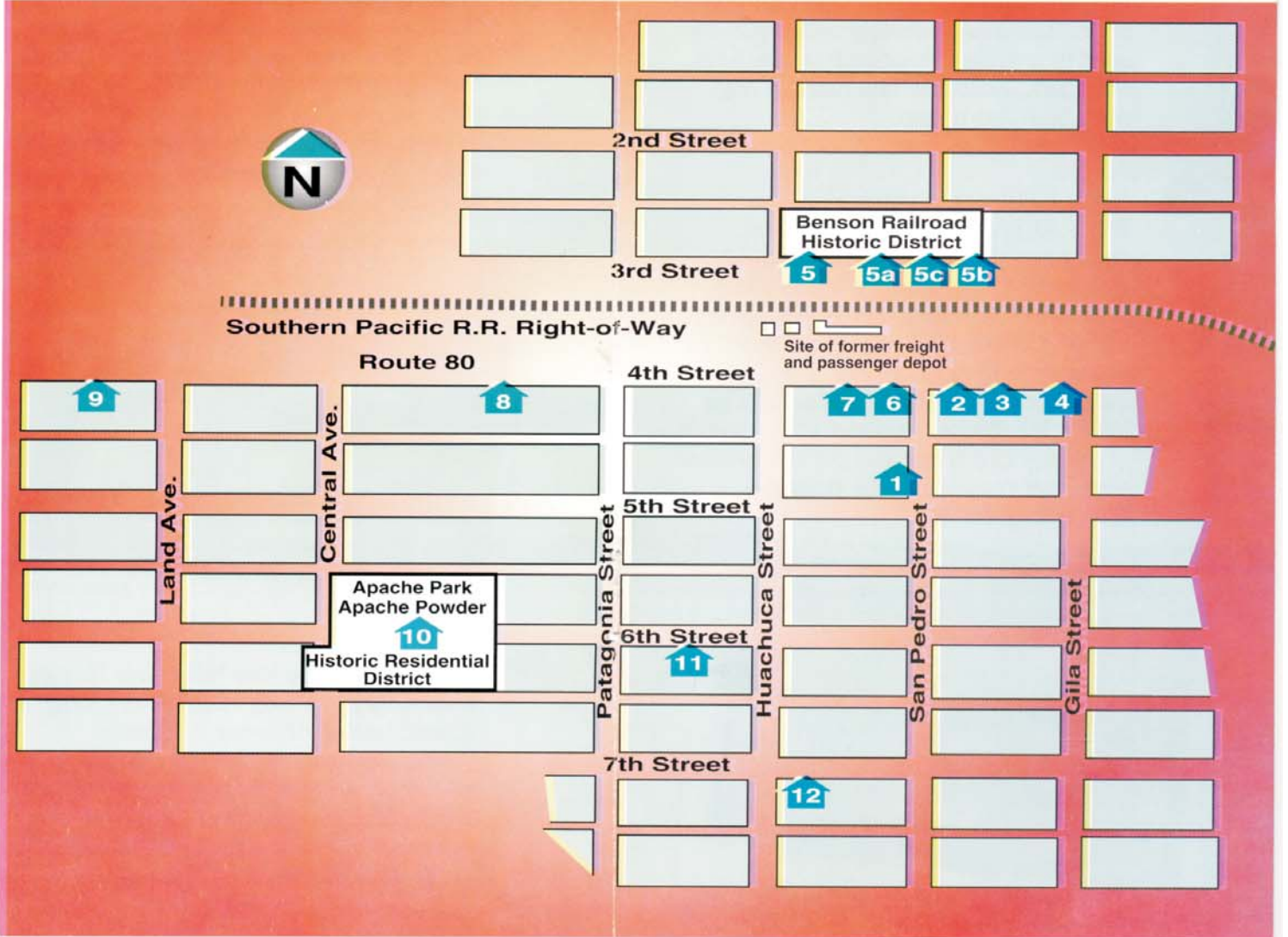


*Hotel Arnold*

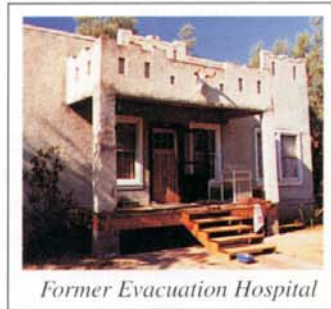
**5b**

305 E. 3rd St., the **Roadmaster's House**, is the only remaining example of a large Queen Anne style house in Benson. Strongly associated with the railroad, this residence is one of Benson's most significant buildings. The roadmaster's role was the repair and maintenance of the railroad tracks and right-of-way.

# BENSON HISTORIC WALKING TOUR MAP

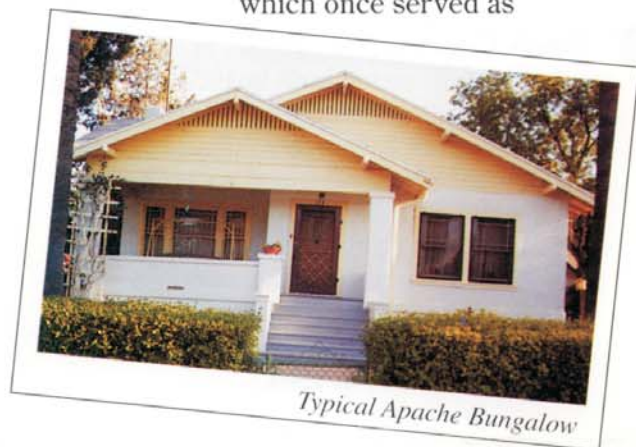


**10** In 1925 the **Apache Powder Historic Residential District** was built on land purchased by the Apache Powder Co., a local nitroglycerin explosives plant, for its management personnel. In 1922, Charles Mills, founder of the former Valley National Bank, built the plant southeast of Benson. At one time this company, known today as Apache Nitrogen Products, Inc., was the largest independent producer of nitroglycerin explosives in the United States. Apache, whose stockholders were the mines, was able to produce powder at a much lower cost thereby stimulating the local economy. Apache employed hundreds of people, even during the Depression.



*Former Evacuation Hospital*

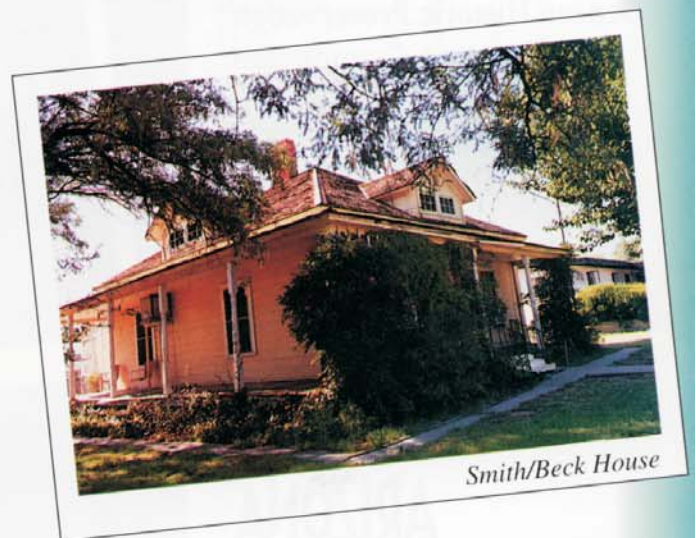
This residential district is comprised of eight residences and a park. Listed on the National Register in 1994, the district has good examples of styles popular in the 1920s. There are seven front-gabled residences in the Craftsman Bungalow style. Two typical Bungalows can be seen at 143 and 189 W. 6th St. A Mission Revival-influenced building, which once served as



*Typical Apache Bungalow*

Evacuation Hospital No. 1 for the Apache Powder Co., can be found at 201 W. 6th St. 243 W. 6th St. is a good example of a Spanish Colonial Revival style house.

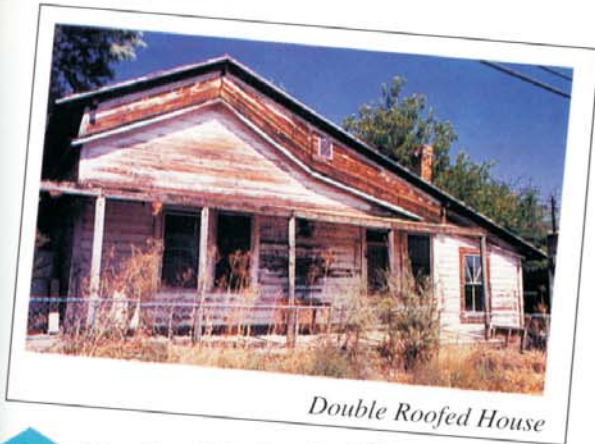
**11** The **Redfield/Romine House**, 146 E. 6th St., is a local example of the Colonial Revival style, popular during Benson's Railroad Era. Possibly built during the mid- 1890s, it was home to Leonard D. Redfield, Benson's first postmaster who made an important contribution to postal history in Arizona for over fifty years. He was mayor of Benson when it was incorporated in 1925. The residence is National Register listed.



*Smith/Beck House*

**12** The **Smith/Beck House**, 425 Huachuca St., is one of Benson's finest Colonial Revival style houses. Possibly built before 1900, it was owned by A. G. and Mary Woodman Smith. Ms. Smith was famous as the state's first woman banker and she made a noteworthy contribution to Arizona banking history. National Register listed.

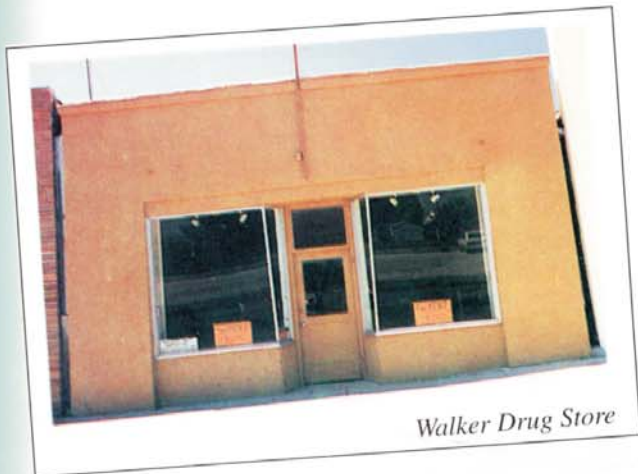
*This concludes our historic walk through Benson. We hope you will visit us again soon.*



*Double Roofed House*

**5c** The **Double Roofed House**, 285 E. 3rd St., is the largest known example of its type in Arizona and a unique example of the Colonial Revival Style. The double-roofing technique was used to provide insulation from the heat. Mr. Clark, Benson's first railroad engineer, built this house.

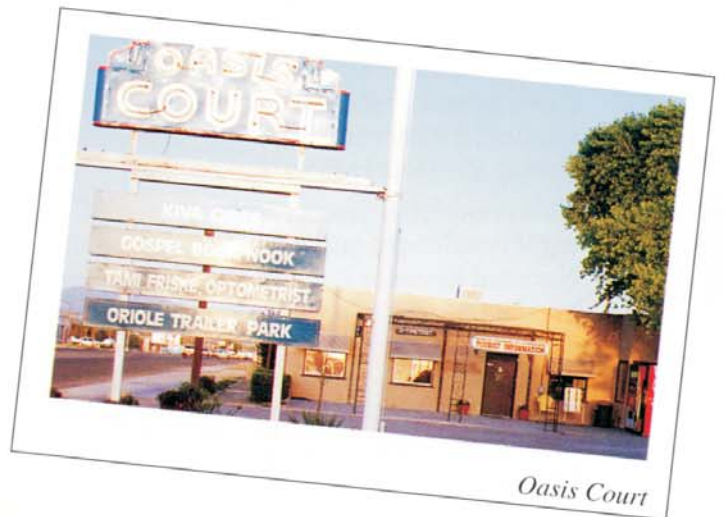
**6** Along E. 4th St., which is also State Route 80, is a series of false-fronted, common-walled commercial buildings which were built during Benson's Railroad Era (1880-1910). 274 E. 4th, once known as **Walker Drug Store**, was probably built in the 1890s. This adobe building originally had dirt floors. The owner, Mr. Walker, was also the co-owner of a stage coach line and the subdivision developer responsible for Benson's Walker's Addition.



*Walker Drug Store*

**7** The **Val Kimbrough Barber Shop**, 264 E. 4th, also built around the turn of the century, was once the Wildcat Saloon where the bartender was killed in a brawl. Later, owner Val Kimbrough ran a barber shop and a western relics museum from the premises.

**8** **Benson Motel**, 185 W. 4th St., was probably built in the 1930s. This auto court exemplifies a property type which emerged across the nation reflecting the automobile's growing impact on land use. Located along State Route 80 (formerly U.S. 80), it represents the beginning of Benson's role as an important highway junction point. The complex has a typical automobile-related site layout.



*Oasis Court*

**9** **Oasis Court**, 363 W. 4th St., is another auto court, built in 1928 or earlier. The integration into the buildings of carports adjacent to individual sleeping units, and the inclusion of amenities such as shops and a separate laundry room, are typical of auto court architecture. In the 1940s, Lyndon L. Hargrave, a noted archaeologist and ornithologist, owned this property. Oasis Court was listed on the National Register in 1994.