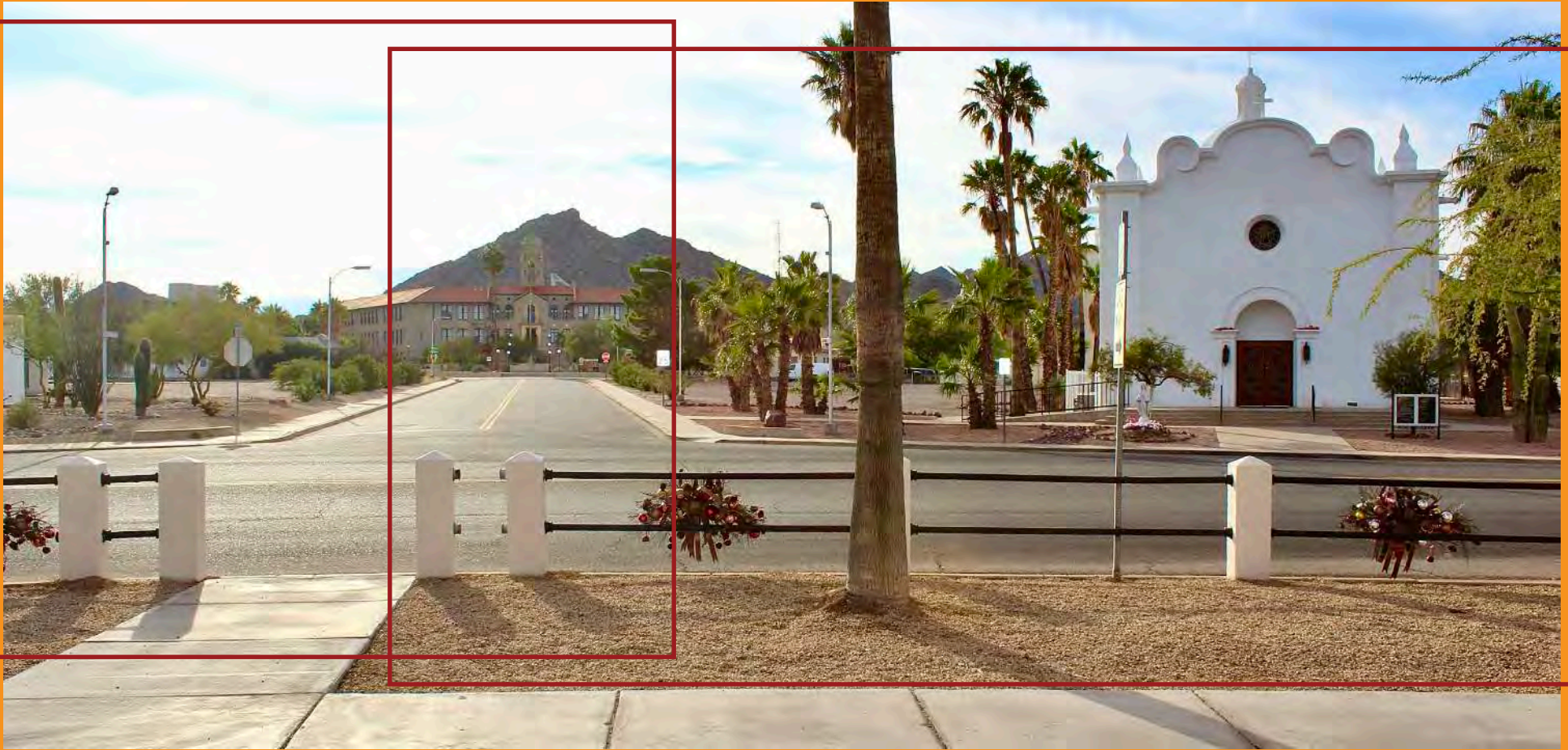


# Ajo Wayfinding Improvement Plan



April 2020

# Introduction

Ajo, Arizona sits at the heart of one of the most biodiverse deserts in the world, a landscape that's recognized as a World Biosphere Reserve. It serves as crossroads for three nations: the United States of America, the Tohono O'Odham Nation and the Republic of Mexico.

The community is fostering a tourism economy based on local food, culture and its impressive natural environment. Helping visitors and locals alike discover the community and learn about its heritage is the driving motivation for the creation and implementation of the *Ajo Wayfinding Improvement Plan*.

As the gateway to Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument and Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge, Ajo both serves as a destination itself and a jumping off point. Unfortunately, many pass through Ajo quickly en route to the beaches and mountains beyond without stopping to appreciate Ajo. We hope that the projects recommended in this plan do their small part to help them stop and take a moment to discover its unique charms.



## Project Lead

Aaron Cooper - International Sonoran Desert Alliance



## Technical Assistance, Design & Layout

Adam Milnor - National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program  
Jon Choi



## Financial Assistance

Pima County Attractions and Tourism



Enterprise Community Partners

## Working Group Participants

Bo Johnson - Ajo District Chamber of Commerce and Kickstart Ajo  
Lupe Alvarez - Western Pima Community Council and American Citizens Social Club  
Lorraine Eiler - Hia C-ed O'odham Alliance and ISDA  
Scott Stonum and Frank Torres - Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument  
Alfredo Soto and Joseph Barnett - Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge  
Mike MacFarlane - Ajo Historical Society  
Jose Castillo - Ajo Historical Society  
Emily Siegel - Sonoran Desert Inn & Conference Center  
Caitlyn Allen - Caitlyn Allen, LLC  
Jovita Wallace - Being in Balance and Kickstart Ajo  
Lance Bell - Ajo Council for the Fine Arts  
Lily Williams - Desert Senita Community Health Center  
Mari Zimmerman - Ajo Realty  
Vicki Tapp - Curley School Artisan Apartments and ISDA  
Bobby Narcho - Curley School Resident Artist and ISDA  
Jim Reiman - Active Community Resident  
Adrian Vega - Active Community Resident

## Purpose

*Improve visitor circulation and experience in Ajo by developing a cohesive system of wayfinding and signage in the walkable, historic town center.*

## Desired Outcomes



Enhanced sense of place

Instill appreciation for Ajo's history, culture and environment

Improved connectivity between points of interest and attractions

Improved pedestrian safety

Increased visitor traffic to trails and areas of interest

Increased conversion rates of pass-through traffic to day and overnight visitors

Increased sales at local businesses

Improved community health outcomes from a more intuitively walkable town center

# How the Plan was Developed

The International Sonoran Desert Alliance (ISDA) formed a community working group of interested residents, businesses owners and local organizations to craft the plan. The National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program provided technical support for ISDA and the team throughout the plan development process.

Several guiding principles were identified at the first working group meeting:

## Guiding Principles



### **Collaboration and co-creation**

The plan should be crafted through the direct input of community partners and local residents. Collaborative principles such as representative participation, active dialogue and a shared vision should be pursued throughout all project phases.



### **A reflection of local character**

Signs and interpretive materials should reflect Ajo's 'funky' and artistic character. To do this, local skills and materials should be used where possible. Vivid color should be emphasized as a powerful tool that can underscore local aesthetics.



### **Broad benefit**

Any improvements should have a widespread and shared impact on the community, rather than any individual location or organization.



### **Respect for shared history**

Interpretation of local heritage should proceed carefully. Messages should be grounded in a deep respect for the diversity of lived experiences and perspectives.



### **Effective and replicable**

A desire for unique signs and materials should be balanced with the need to ensure signs are readable and can be replaced in cases of damage or wear.



### **Integration with the Sonoran Desert**

Ajo's connection to the surrounding landscape should be celebrated. Visitors should be encouraged to explore and appreciate what makes the area a World Biosphere Reserve.

# How the Plan was Developed

## Project Schedule



*ISDA Executive Director Aaron Cooper presenting to the Western Pima County Community Council*



*A map of attractions generated at an early working group meeting.*

- June 30, 2019** Project awarded Pima County Tourism and Attractions funding
- September 10, 2019** Project selected for National Park Service RTCA assistance
- October 3, 2019** Working group kick off meeting  
Presentation to the Western Pima County Community Council
- November 21, 2019** Working group design review meeting
- December 2019** Preliminary sign design standards and sign locations prepared for working group review
- February 14 to March 5, 2020** Test signs installed in Ajo Plaza with opportunity for public comment
- February 29, 2020** Draft plan available for ISDA Board Membership Meeting
- March 5, 2020** Presentation to the Ajo Community Partnership Panel
- March 12, 2020** Presentation to the Western Pima County Community Council
- April 30, 2020** Completion of Final Ajo Wayfinding Improvement Plan
- June 30, 2020** Target date for installation of initial wayfinding and interpretation signs

# Context

## The Audience

The wayfinding working group met twice in late 2019 to discuss the challenges posed by the current system of wayfinding and opportunities for improvement. During the discussion, the group identified several segments that comprise the target audience:

- Visitors on their way to Rocky Point, Mexico from the Phoenix (primary) or Tucson (secondary) metropolitan areas
- Day trippers to Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument and Ajo
- Local residents including youth, those interested in health/fitness Those returning to Ajo after time away
- Overnight guests, often staying at the Sonoran Desert Inn or Guest House
- Long term, repeat winter residents staying for most of the winter season
- Shorter term, winter residents often visiting in recreational vehicles and staying for a period of days or weeks

**58%** of Ajo visitors are in the area because of Rocky Point

**23%** of Ajo visitors are in the area to visit Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument

**1 in 3** Ajo visitors are here for the first time

## Current Challenges

### Visitor Unfamiliarity with Ajo and Its Attractions

Just 5% of visitors identify Ajo as their primary destination. Creating a favorable first impression for the thousands of travellers that travel into Ajo on Highway 85 each day is a key area of opportunity for local organizations and businesses.

### Multiple Jurisdictions

Ajo is an unincorporated community in western Pima County. Installation of signs and other improvements requires coordination among a variety of agencies and landowners. The International Sonoran Desert Alliance is the owner and manager of plaza, Curley School and Sonoran Desert Inn and Conference Center. State Highway 85 includes an Arizona Department of Transportation right of way. Sidewalks and roadways outside of these two areas is under the jurisdiction for the Pima County Department of Transportation.

### Mismatched and Aging Signage

Current wayfinding signage does not utilize a single standard. The end result is a mix of sign sizes, fonts, colors and installation locations. A sizable portion of the existing sign inventory would benefit from replacement.



Destination signs in Ajo. Photos courtesy NPS.

# Context

## Historic Townsite Destinations and Attractions



### Historic Plaza

A beautiful example of Spanish-Colonial Revival style architecture that serves as the center of the historic townsite. The plaza includes a visitor center, library, cafe, shops, galleries and a restaurant. The plaza was purchased by ISDA in 2008 and is in the midst of a multi-year process of restoration and revitalization.



### Curley School

A historic school built in 1919 that has been renovated into housing, artist studios and event space.



### Artists Alley

A series of bold murals on the southern side of the historic plaza serve as a statement about the community's artist talents.



### Ajo's Historic Churches and Homes

Whitewashed churches and period bungalows greet first-time visitors with graceful architecture: the Immaculate Conception Church (pictured) was built in 1924 while its neighbor the Federated Church two years later in 1926.



### Triangle Park - Ajo Memory Project

Just off the plaza, a small grassy park contains the history of Ajo as told by those who lived it. The Ajo Memory Project reflects the community's past in a series of panels and art exhibits.

# Context

## Historic Townsite Destinations and Attractions (contd)



### Ajo Historical Society Museum

Located in the old St. Catherine's Indian Mission, the museum houses artifacts and mementos that tell the story of Ajo's past.



### Sonoran Desert Inn and Conference Center

Housed in a portion of the Curley School campus, the Inn and Conference Center showcases local craftsmanship while hosting groups of all sizes.



### New Cornelia Mine Lookout

A panoramic view across nearly two miles of open pit mine is available from the Mine Lookout on Indian Village Road.



### Old Phelps Dodge Hospital

The town's original hospital enjoys a commanding view. The nearly 30,000 square foot structure is only open to the public via guided tour.



### Scenic Loop/Darby Well Road

A trip through the distinctive cacti and geology of the Sonoran Desert is easily accessible from town.



### Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument

The Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument represents an exceptional example of an intact Sonoran Desert ecosystem. It was recognized as a first generation World Biosphere Reserve in 1976.



# “Only in Ajo” Branding Campaign

The International Sonoran Desert Alliance secured the assistance of Local First Arizona Foundation’s Rural Development Council to unify Ajo under one message that would apply to living, visiting and doing business locally.

A series of community workshops were held in 2018 and 2019 during which participants were asked reflect on what the community has been and where it’s heading. The discussion guided the creation of several alternative logos and color schemes.

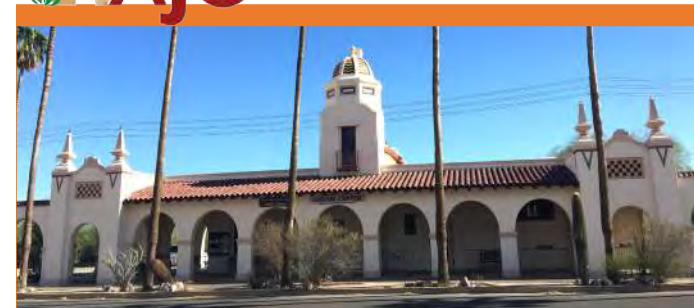
The processes developed a distinctive look and feel, color palette, set of recommended fonts and an “Only in Ajo” tagline and logo. Key design elements include:

- **Vivid colors** that employ community creativity and desert surroundings
- A **Spanish archway** that captures the local architectural style
- An **organ pipe cactus** that recognizes outdoor recreation and the sonoran desert
- The **deep purple sky and silhouette of hat mountain** to recognize the area as the ancestral lands of the Tohono O’odham and Hia C-ed O’dham

The branding guidelines are applied in the *Ajo Wayfinding Improvement Plan* and included as an appendix for reference.



The logo (above) and example promotional material (below) using Ajo’s new branding guidelines.



Visit the Historic Ajo Plaza



Visitors Center, Food, Coffee & Art Galleries

# Sign Types and Installation Phases

## Sign Types

The plan recommends a family of signs that includes five types. The following section includes details on the function of each type, along with detailed information in sizes and materials.

*Pedestrian Waysides - (W#)*

*Triangular Kiosk (TK-#)*

*Wall Wayside (WW-#)*

*Wall Mountain Directional/Informational (WD-#)*

*Post Mountain Directional (PMD-#)*

## Phasing

Signs will be installed in the historic town center before proceeding outwards. This approach recognizes the density of attractions, frequency of foot traffic and current approach to destination promotion. Improvements outside the town center, while important, have reduced impact without a system of coherent signs and wayfinding first being established at destination locations. Broadly, the phases are as follows:

- A. Wall mounted directionals and interpretive waysides in the plaza
- B. Post mounted directionals and waysides with visitor maps in the historic town center
- C. Waysides with interpretive information at key attractions in the historic center (e.g. Artists Alley, Curley School)
- D. Waysides with interpretive information and/or maps at outlying locations

Timing and order of installation will be strongly influenced by the availability of funding. The phasing of individual signs is reflected in tables on the following pages.

This plan does not call for the removal and replacement of existing signs. However, individual attractions are encouraged to consider this step if signs are damaged, faded or illegible. If possible, replacement signs should apply Only in Ajo branding guidelines.

After completion of the signs in this plan, additional locations and signs can be considered. Other opportunities identified by the working group include directionsto/from Bud Walker Park and visitor information or maps at additional gas stations or community business.

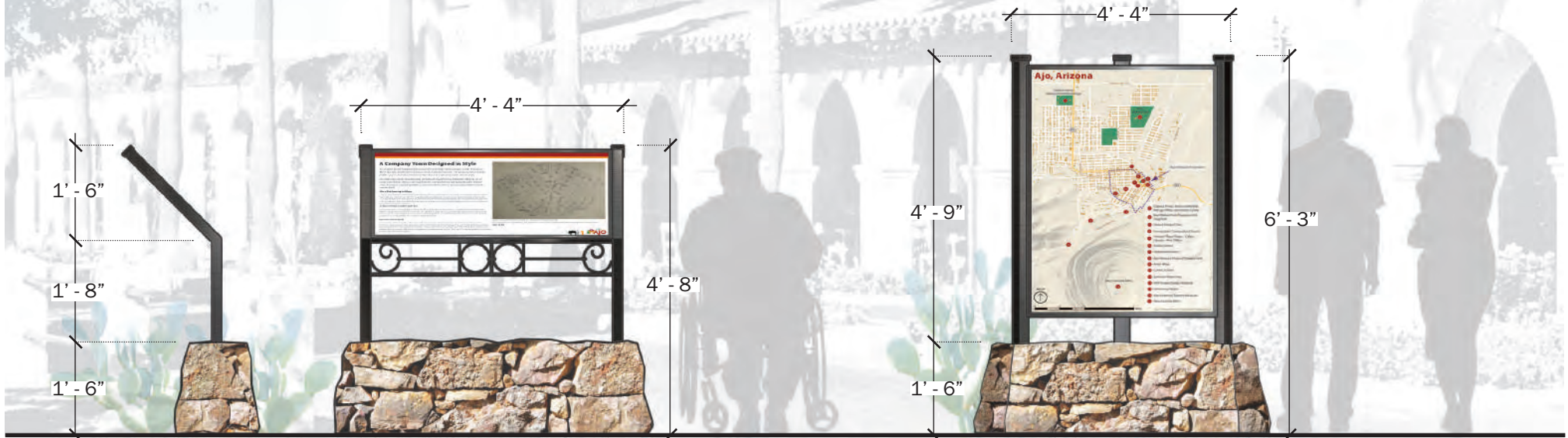
## Ajo Interpretive and Wayfinding Final Concept

**Pedestrian Wayside** - Low profile waysides tell a compelling, succinct story. Instead of competing with the view, the information on the panels serve as “a caption on the landscape”. The content on each wayside is easily accessible and readable. In Ajo, waysides will be installed at key attractions and historical features such as the plaza and Curley School. The materials of the wayside base and frame serve as a reflection of Ajo’s mining and architectural history.

Sign panel dimensions : 48”w x 24”h x .125” thickness  
 Material : Gel Coat Laminate or comparable  
 Frame materials : 2” square steel tubing (outer frame)  
                           1” square steel tubing (inner frame)  
 Detailing : Wrought iron, steel strap, post caps  
 Sign base : Mine tailings, mortar

**Triangular Kiosk** - Upright orientation kiosks convey information about the surrounding area rather than direct the viewer’s attention to a specific feature. The upright triangular kiosks will feature maps of the town center and surrounding region, business listings and other useful information for visitors. These kiosks area used less frequently due to their size and cost.

Sign panel dimensions : 36”w x 48”h x .125” thickness  
 Material : Gel Coat Laminate or comparable  
 Frame materials : 3” square steel tubing (outer frame)  
                           1” square steel tubing (inner frame)  
 Detailing : Post caps  
 Sign base : Mine tailings, mortar



### Precedents - Colors, Textures and Materials



mining heritage



mine tailings for sign base



historic lamp post base



local wrought iron details



local wrought iron details

NOTES : 1. All dimensions provided are approximate and based on pre-manufactured sign frames from Pannier graphics.  
 2. Final material selections are to be determined by contractor or individuals responsible for fabrication.

PROJECT : Ajo Wayfinding  
 Ajo, Arizona  
 National Park Service RTCA

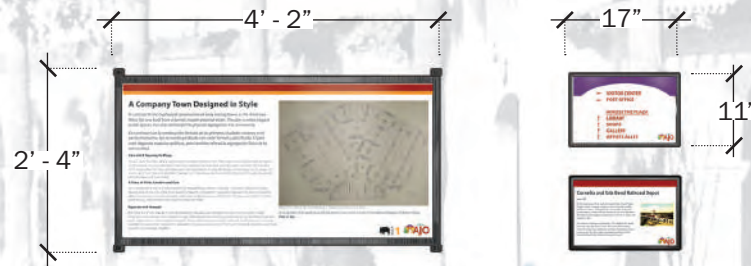
SHEET : 01  
 Wayfinding  
 Final

## Ajo Interpretive and Wayfinding Final Concept

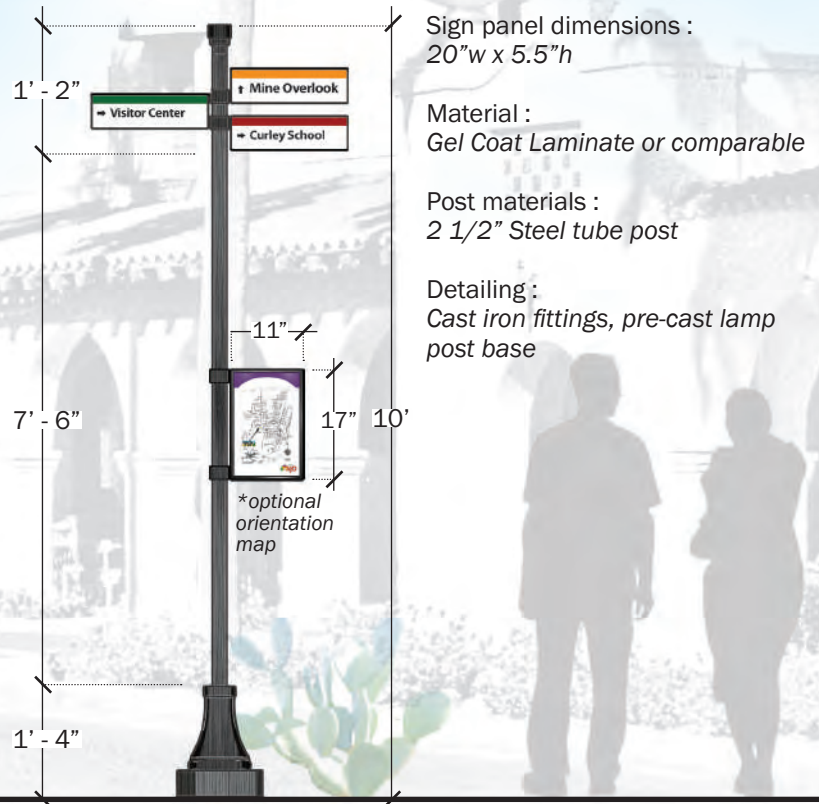
### Wall Wayside and Small Wall Mounted Directional/Informational

Not all signs included in the plan will be freestanding. In some locations a wall mounting may be more appropriate. The wall wayside includes the same information as a pedestrian low profile wayside, while the small informational signs serve as historic markers with short snippets of relevant information about a particular building. The wall directional signs are intended for use in the breezeway of the Ajo plaza.

Sign panel dimensions : 48" w x 24" h x .125 w/GCL (Wall Wayside)  
 16" w x 10" h x .125 (Small Wall Mounted)  
 Material : Gel Coat Laminate or comparable  
 Frame materials : 1" square steel tubing (Wall Wayside)  
 1/2" square steel (Small Wall Mounted)  
 Detailing : Post caps



**Post Mounted Directional** - Upright directional help pedestrians navigate between key locations. Easily visible and intuitive, the directional signs provide reassurance for first time visitors and guide foot traffic to preferred destinations like the Visitor Center. The design of the post mounted directional echoes Ajo's historic lampposts.



### Precedents - Colors, Textures and Materials



mining heritage



mine tailings for sign base



historic lamp post base



local wrought iron details



local wrought iron details

NOTES : 1. All dimensions provided are approximate and based on pre-manufactured sign frames from Pannier graphics.  
 2. Final material selections are to be determined by contractor or individuals responsible for fabrication.

PROJECT : Ajo Wayfinding  
 Ajo, Arizona  
 National Park Service RTCA

SHEET : 02  
 Wayfinding  
 Final



**Final Concept Render**



NOTES :

PROJECT : Ajo Wayfinding  
Ajo, Arizona  
National Park Service RTCA

SHEET : 03  
Wayfinding  
Final

# Sign Locations

## Legend



-  Pedestrian Wayside
-  Wall Wayside
-  Post-Mounted Directional

#	Location
W-1	Plaza East
W-2	Plaza East
W-3	Plaza West
W-4	Plaza West
WW-1	Artists Alley
WW-2	Railroad Depot Breezeway north of Visitor Center
PMD-1	Highway 85 & Lomita
PMD-2	Highway 85 & Triangle Park
PMD-6	Plaza & Pajaro
PMD-7	La Mina & Orrilla



# Sign Locations

## Legend


-  Pedestrian Wayside
-  Post-Mounted Directional

#	Location
W-5	Curley School
W-6	Sonoran Desert Inn
PMD-4	Vananda - 5 way intersection
PMD-5	Esperanza
PMD-6	Vananda & Orrilla
PMD-7	La Mina & Orrilla



# Sign Locations

## Legend

 Pedestrian Wayside


#	Location
W-7	View of Old Phelps Dodge Hospital
W-8	Former Location of Tortilla Flats
W-9 (or WW)	New Cornelia Mine Overlook
W-10 (or WW)	Ajo Historical Society Museum/St Catherine's Indian School





# Sign Locations

## Legend

 Wall Wayside

#	Location
WW-3	Shell Station
WW-4	Desert Senita Clinic
WW-5	Cabeza Prieta NWR HQ and Visitor Center



# Interpretive and Map Wayside Locations and Themes

#	Location	Themes & Theme Statement	Phase
<b>W-1</b>	Plaza - east	<b>Deep Indigenous History and Ajo's Cultural Crossroads</b> Ajo is a mix of three cultures: Mexican, Tohono O'odham, and Anglo. The community's history, food and artistic expression are a reflection of shared heritage.	1
<b>W-2</b>	Plaza - east	<b>A Company Town Designed in Style</b> In contrast to the haphazard construction of other early mining towns, Ajo was built from a formal, master-planned vision. The plan created elegant public spaces, but also reinforced the physical segregation the community.	1
<b>W-3</b>	Plaza - west	<b>From the New Cornelia to Modern Day Resilience</b> Ajo was a company town for over 70 years. It is now undergoing a transformation that embodies new life, growth, and peace. This change is accompanied by a humility and authenticity that honors community origins.	1
<b>W-4</b>	Plaza - west	<b>Ajo's Spanish Colonial Revival Heart - Like a Bird Opening its Wings</b> The graceful symmetry of Ajo's town center is front center from the west end of the plaza, where a pair of historic churches frame the Curley School and Camelback Mountain. The community's central gathering places is a showcase of Spanish Colonial Revival architectural detail.	1
<b>WW-1</b>	Artists Alley and North Side of Plaza Building in Triangle Park	<b>The Arts are Alive and Well</b> Ajo's eclectic nature and diversity are expressed in wonderful displays of public and community art, often with in outsider bent, in Artists Alley and throughout town.	2
<b>W-5</b>	Curley School	<b>Curley School: A Treasure Saved</b> The Curley School is an architectural masterpiece that dates to 1919. The school faced an uncertain future until the community and International Sonoran Desert Alliance completed a multi-million dollar renovation and transformation in 2007.	2

**Sign Numbering System**

Pedestrian Waysides - (W#)

Triangular Kiosk (TK-#)

Wall Wayside (WW-#)

Wall Mountain Directional/Informational (WD-#)

Post Mountain Directional (PMD-#)

## Interpretive and Map Wayside Locations and Themes (contd.)

#	Location	Themes & Theme Statement	Phase
<b>W-6</b>	Sonoran Desert Inn and Conference Center courtyard	<b>Generous Desert Hospitality</b> Overnight visitors to the Sonoran Desert Inn and Conference center are greeted with a restoration that blends the heritage of the former schoolhouse with the spirit of the Sonoran Desert region.	2
<b>W-7</b>	View of Old Phelps Dodge Hospital	<b>A Company Hospital for a Company Town</b> The New Cornelia Copper Company erected a hospital for their employees that featured cutting edge equipment including an operating room and x-ray machine.	3
<b>W-8</b>	Former location of Tortilla Flats	<i>to be developed</i>	3
<b>W-9</b>	New Cornelia Mine Overlook	<i>to be developed</i>	3
<b>W-10</b>	St. Catherine's Indian School/ Ajo Historical Society Museum	<i>to be developed</i>	3
<b>WW-2 or TK-1</b>	Railroad Depot Breezeway north of Visitor Center	Local and regional maps and information about Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge and other destinations along with information about the World Biosphere Reserve program	1
<b>WW-3</b>	Highway 85 Shell Station	Local and regional maps and information about Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge and other destinations	2
<b>WW-4</b>	Desert Senita Clinic	Information about the history of the building housing the clinic; small pedestrian map and encouragement for walking	3
<b>WW-5</b>	Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters and Visitor Center	Local and regional maps and information about Ajo, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument and other destinations along with information about the World Biosphere Reserve program	3

### Sign Numbering System

Pedestrian Waysides - (W#)

Triangular Kiosk (TK-#)

Wall Wayside (WW-#)

Wall Mountain Directional/Informational (WD-#)

Post Mountain Directional (PMD-#)

# Directional Sign Installation Locations

#	Location	Purpose	Phase
<b>WD1 to 9</b>	Plaza - Under the Archway, numerous locations	Orientation to destinations within the historic plaza	1
<b>PMD-1</b>	Highway 85 & Lomita - Immaculate Conception Church	Orientation to/from the plaza and Curley School complex	2
<b>PMD-2</b>	Highway 85 & Triangle Park	Orientation to Triangle Park/Ajo Memory Park from plaza	2
<b>PMD-3</b>	Plaza & Pajaro - eastside Plaza Rd	Connection between plaza and clinic	2
<b>PMD-4</b>	Vanada @ 5 way intersection - Curley School	Orientation in front of Curley School	2
<b>PMD-5</b>	Esperanza	Orientation between Sonoran Desert Inn and Conference Center and Plaza	2
<b>PMD-6</b>	Venada & Orilla	Orientation towards Sonoran Desert Inn and Conference Center	2
<b>PMD-7</b>	La Mina & Orilla	Orientation towards attractions along La Mina/Indian School Road	2

**Sign Numbering System**

Pedestrian Waysides - (W#)

Triangular Kiosk (TK-#)

Wall Wayside (WW-#)

Wall Mountain Directional/Informational (WD-#)

Post Mountain Directional (PMD-#)

# Estimated Costs

	Component	Sign Type					total with 20% contingency
		Pedestrian Wayside	Triangular Kiosk	Wall Wayside	Small Wall Mounted Directional	Post Mounted Directional	
<b>Cost</b>	Panel(s)	\$200-\$250	\$250-\$300 per panel \$750 - \$900 per kiosk*	\$200-\$250	\$30-\$50	\$60-\$90 per sign \$240 - \$720 per post**	
	Frame	\$900-\$1100	\$1000 - \$1500	\$250-\$400	\$150 - \$250	\$700 - \$1,000	
	Total Per Sign	\$1100 - \$1350	\$1,750 - \$2,400	\$450 - \$650	\$180 - \$300	\$940 - \$1,720	
	<i>Estimated Quantity</i>	10	1	5	10	7	
	<b>Total Cost</b>	\$11,000 - \$13,500	\$1,750 - \$2,400	\$2,250 - \$3,250	\$1,800 - \$3,00	\$6,580 - \$12,040	\$28,060 - \$41,030

Subject to change. Panel costs include shipping. Costs dependent on quantities and shipping order size. Panel costs for waysides do not include costs of layout or design.

Installation costs are included in frame costs, but may change from estimate obtained in March 2020

\*Dependent on whether fabricated panels are included on 2 or 3 kiosk sides.

\*\* Dependent on number of unique fabricated panels, which ranges from 4 to 8.

# Potential Grants and Funding Sources

The following grants could be used to implement the wayfinding plan:

1. Pima County Attractions & Tourism - Tourism-Related Outside Agency Program
2. Freeport-McMoRan - Community Investment Grants
3. Arizona Historical Society Grants
4. Arizona Humanities Project and Mini-Grants
5. Community Foundation of Southern Arizona-administered Grants

# Principles for Effective Wayfinding and Orientation

## Create a Logical and Predictable Set of Connections

Directional signs connect physical places. They should be installed so that the next directional sign, or the attraction itself, is obvious to the pedestrian. Sight lines should be double checked prior to installation and maintained; vegetation or other visual obstacles should be removed or prevented to ensure these sightlines stay intact.

## Use a Unique and Straightforward Set of Names

Each attraction or destination should have a single name or title. The simple name chosen for each place should be repeated throughout the sign system and on visitor maps.

## Utilize Universal Design

Signs should follow the principles of universal design and consider users of all ability levels. Specific applications of universal design in this plan include the use of high contrast backgrounds, appropriate sizes for wayside exhibits and the use of non capital block lettering.

# Principles of Effective Interpretive and Outdoor Exhibits

Adapted from “*Wayside Exhibits: A Guide to Developing Outdoor Interpretive Exhibits*” National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center. October 2009.

## Meet the Challenge of the 3/30/3 Rule

Visitors have a short attention span and lots of choices. Research suggests a sign has just three seconds to catch a person’s attention. They then make a decision to read the sign in thirty seconds or less. If they decide to read it, they’ll do so in less than three minutes.

## Use Compelling Images and Titles

Photographs, illustrations and diagrams are often more effective at telling a story than text.

## Caption the Landscape, Don’t Compete with It

Outdoor waysides should interpret a place in its context, complimenting and illuminating what the viewer is seeing.

## Make Choices and Don’t Go Overboard

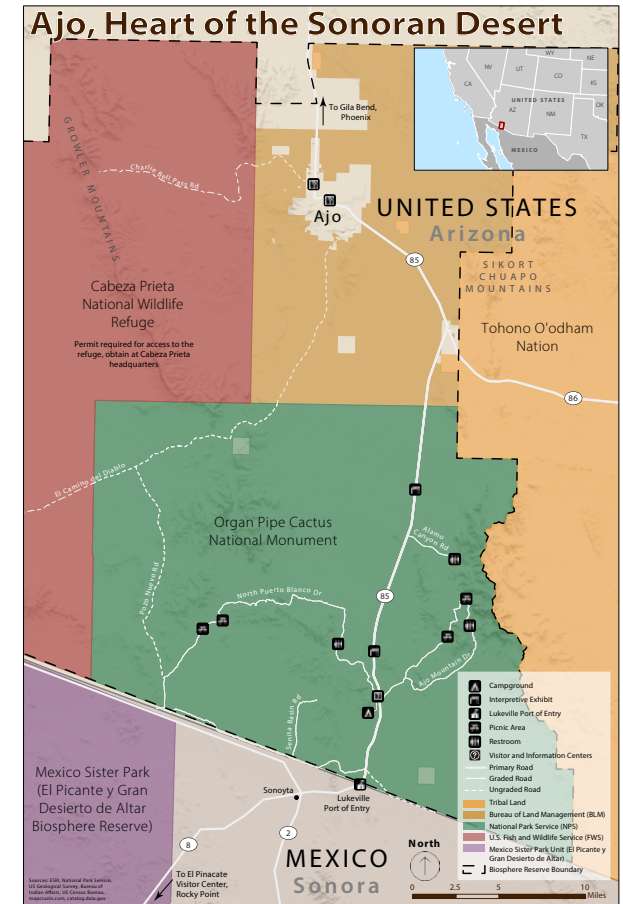
There will always be more stories than available space to tell them. Being selective about the most important themes and topics for educational waysides is critical.



*Triangle Park, the location of the Ajo Memory Project. Courtesy NPS.*

# Visitor Maps

To support the goals of the wayfinding plan, a series of visitor maps have been created that highlight attractions at three scales: the Ajo Historic Townsite and immediate area; the entirety of Ajo; and lastly, the Sonoran Desert region along Highway 85. The primary use of these maps will be in physical installations listed above. The maps could also be used in future printed or digital materials.



# Installation Considerations

- Permission and approval of the landowner must be secured before sign installation.
- All signs within Pima County Department of Transportation or Arizona Department of Transportation rights-of-way need to be installed after obtaining the relevant permits and approval.
- Wayside bases should be constructed to allow sufficient space for wayside panel removal replacement.
- The vertical directional signs need have breakaway capability in the event of a vehicle crash.

# Additional Recommendations

The projects and actions below were identified during the collaborative process of creating the *Ajo Wayfinding Improvement Plan*. While out of the scope of pedestrian wayfinding improvement, they are captured here as items of consideration for Pima County Department of Transportation, Arizona Department of Transportation and other local partners (indicated in parenthesis).

1. Improved visitor information at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument campgrounds and visitor information centers that highlights the importance of the World Biosphere Reserve Program (NPS, ISDA)
2. Improvement, replacement and standardization of vehicular directional signs along La Mina, Indian School and Sahuaro Roads (PDOT consideration)
3. Modification of the ADOT-installed visitor center directional sign from Highway 85 southbound to reflect a lag time in the left turn (ADOT Consideration)
4. Installation of a promotional sign/billboard alongside Highway 85 southbound just north of Ajo (ISDA)
5. Installation of a promotional sign/billboard at the intersection of Highways 85 and 86 in Why (ISDA)



- 1
- ← **Visitor Center**
  - ← **Post Office**
  - ← **Cafe**
  - **Ajo Memory Project**
  - **Murals**



← **Visitor Center**

← **Post Office**

## Across the Plaza

↑ **Library**

↑ **Shops/Galleries**

↑ **Restaurant**

↑ **Artists Alley**



- **Visitor Center**
- ➔ **Artists Alley**

- ← **Library**
- ← **Shops/Galleries**
- ← **Restaurant**
- ← **Artists Alley**
  
- **Post Office**
- **Cafe**

← **Visitor Center**  
→ **Artists Alley**

← **Library**

← **Restaurant**

→ **Artists Alley**

→ **Visitor Center**

- **Shops/Galleries**
- **Visitor Center**
- **Artists Alley**

**Across the Plaza**

- ↑ **Cafe**
- ↑ **Post Office**



# Cornelia and Gila Bend Railroad Depot

*circa 1915*

At the beginning of large scale mining activities in Ajo, the Phelps-Dodge Copper Company sought to link Ajo with smelter facilities in Tucson. This depot and a new 43-mile rail line was constructed to connect with the nearest rail service in Gila Bend. The depot hosted freight and passenger service for 71 years until closing in 1985.

An extensive restoration completed in 2013 adapted the depot for reuse as the Ajo Visitor Center. The Tucson-Pima County Historical Commission bestowed its Historic Preservation Award to the project “for the sensitive, masterful restoration of this historically significant building for adaptive reuse.”



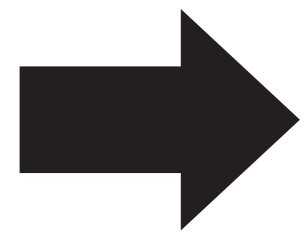




**→ Curley School**



**→ Inn/Conf Center**



**Clinic**



**← Plaza**



**→ Visitor Center**



**↑ Mine Overlook**



**→ History Museum**



**→ Artists Alley**



# Ajo: Cultural Crossroads and the Homeland of the O'odham People

The borderlands of Arizona have been home to O'odham families for thousands of years. The region sits at the unique intersection of people, cultures and nations.

Las tierras fronterizas de Arizona han sido el hogar de familias de O'odham durante miles de años. La región se encuentra en la intersección única de personas, culturas y naciones.

O'odham hemajkam o hekhu i-amjiḍ an ki: hemu chekṣañ jeweḍ da:m. Id jeweḍ an, na:nko ma:s hemajkam c hihimdag ia ha'icug.

## From au'auho to Ajo

Ajo is part of the vast homeland of the O'odham people that stretches across Arizona and northern Mexico. The modern name Ajo comes from the O'odham word for a naturally occurring red paint – au'auho – found nearby and used for ceremonial purposes.

## People of the Sonoran Desert

The O'odham have practiced a way of life adapted to the Sonoran Desert for over 10,000 years. Several O'odham groups reside in Arizona, including the Hia-C'ed O'odham (or Sand People), the Tohono O'odham (or Desert People), and the Akimel O'odham (or River People). The Hia-C'ed and Tohono O'odham have long called the Ajo area home. While there are differences in customs, dialects, and federal recognition, a shared language and deep traditions bind these groups together.

## Contact Between Cultures

O'odham people have a long history of interaction with those from outside this region. European colonialists arrived in the 1500s, which led to the region becoming part of the Spanish Empire for three centuries until the independence of Mexico in 1821. Then, under the Gadsden Purchase of 1853 from Mexico, the United States of America acquired the land south of the Gila River, which created an international border bisecting the O'odham homeland.

Every time new colonists arrived, the O'odham lost land and access to places of cultural and traditional value. Despite this hardship, the blending of people throughout the borderlands over time has created a distinctive shared heritage of art, food, and culture.



While passing through the homeland of the O'odham, tap into local culture and tune into KOHN 91.9 FM. Known as the Voice of the Tohono O'odham Nation, the station is part of the Hewel Ni'ok or "Wind Talk" network.



Gathering desert plants like Organ Pipe fruit is a central part of traditional O'odham culture



O'odham are known widely for their skill in basket weaving.

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# A Company Town Designed in Style

*In contrast to the haphazard construction of early mining towns across the American West, Ajo was built from a formal, master-planned vision. The plan created elegant public spaces where the community could come together, but at the same time enforced the physical segregation of people in the community.*

*En contraste con la construcción fortuita de las primeras ciudades mineras en todo el oeste americano, Ajo se construyó desde una visión formal y planificada. El plan creó elegantes espacios públicos donde la comunidad podía unirse, pero al mismo tiempo impuso la segregación física de las personas en la comunidad.*

## A Place of Pride, Comfort and Care

Ajo is preserved as the only fully realized City Beautiful town center in Arizona. The vision came from New Cornelia Mine founder John Greenway, who wanted to design a community that would attract workers and investment. Purposeful design and urban beauty were at the core of the City Beautiful movement. Proponents believed that towns should be places for physical and spiritual health rather than simply business and industry.

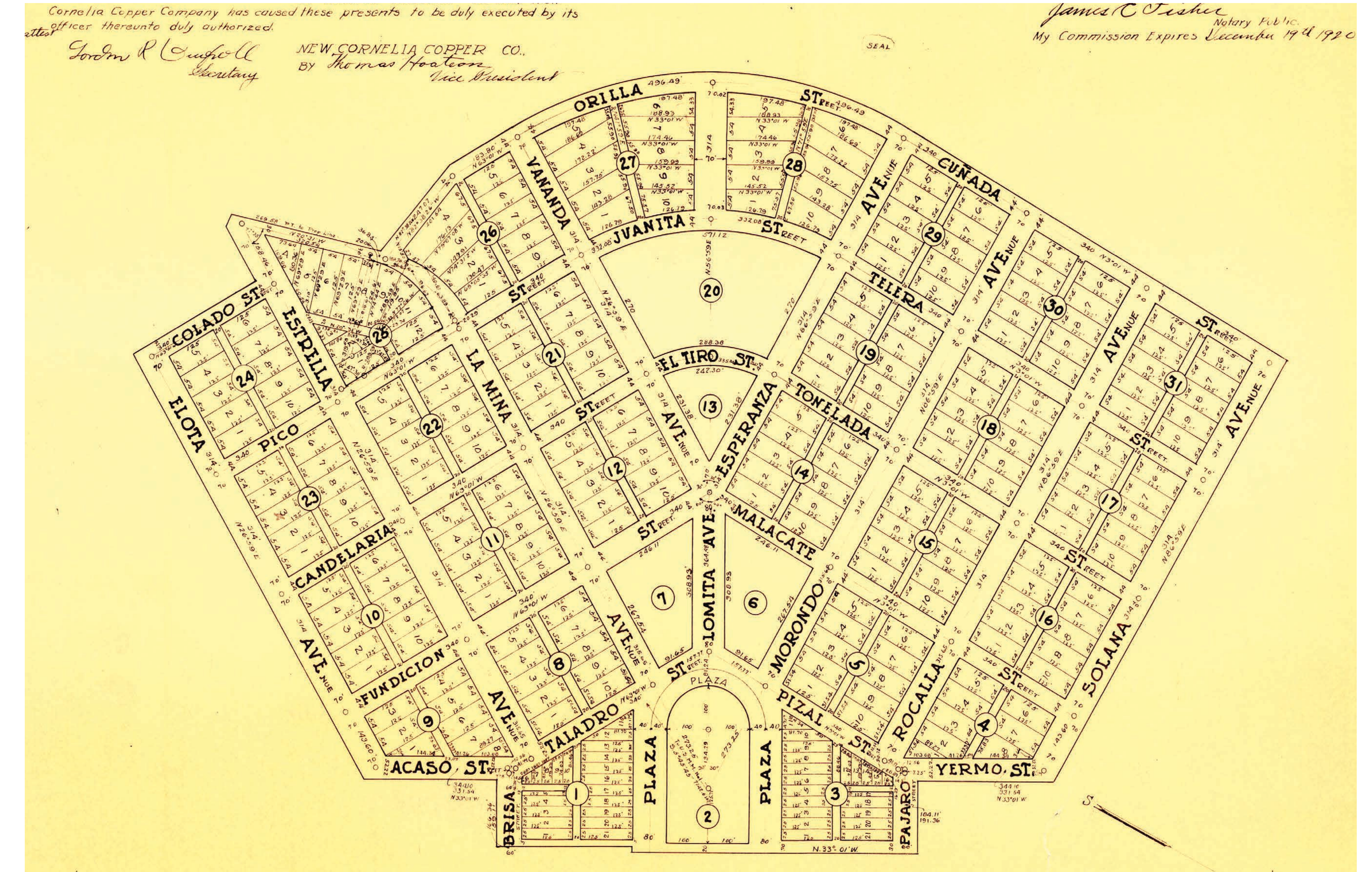
Harmony and symmetry were hallmarks of the town's 1917 master plan, with boulevards that radiate from the plaza evoking the image of a bird opening its wings. The plaza was meant to bring people together and instill pride among mine workers who chose to make Ajo their home. In recognition of its significance, the Ajo historic town center is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

## Separate and Unequal

Not everyone benefited equally from Ajo's grand design. Housing was segregated by ethnicity and status. Anglos who oversaw mine operations were offered numerous styles and locations of homes, while Mexican laborers were offered a single choice within the "Mexican Townsite." Native American mine workers were left to find their own housing outside the town center. In spite of this separation, the plaza served as Ajo's "front yard" where all residents could come together to relax, socialize, and celebrate.



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Map of the original Ajo Townsite design (above) and how the plaza appeared soon after construction (below). Courtesy of the Ajo Historical Society.



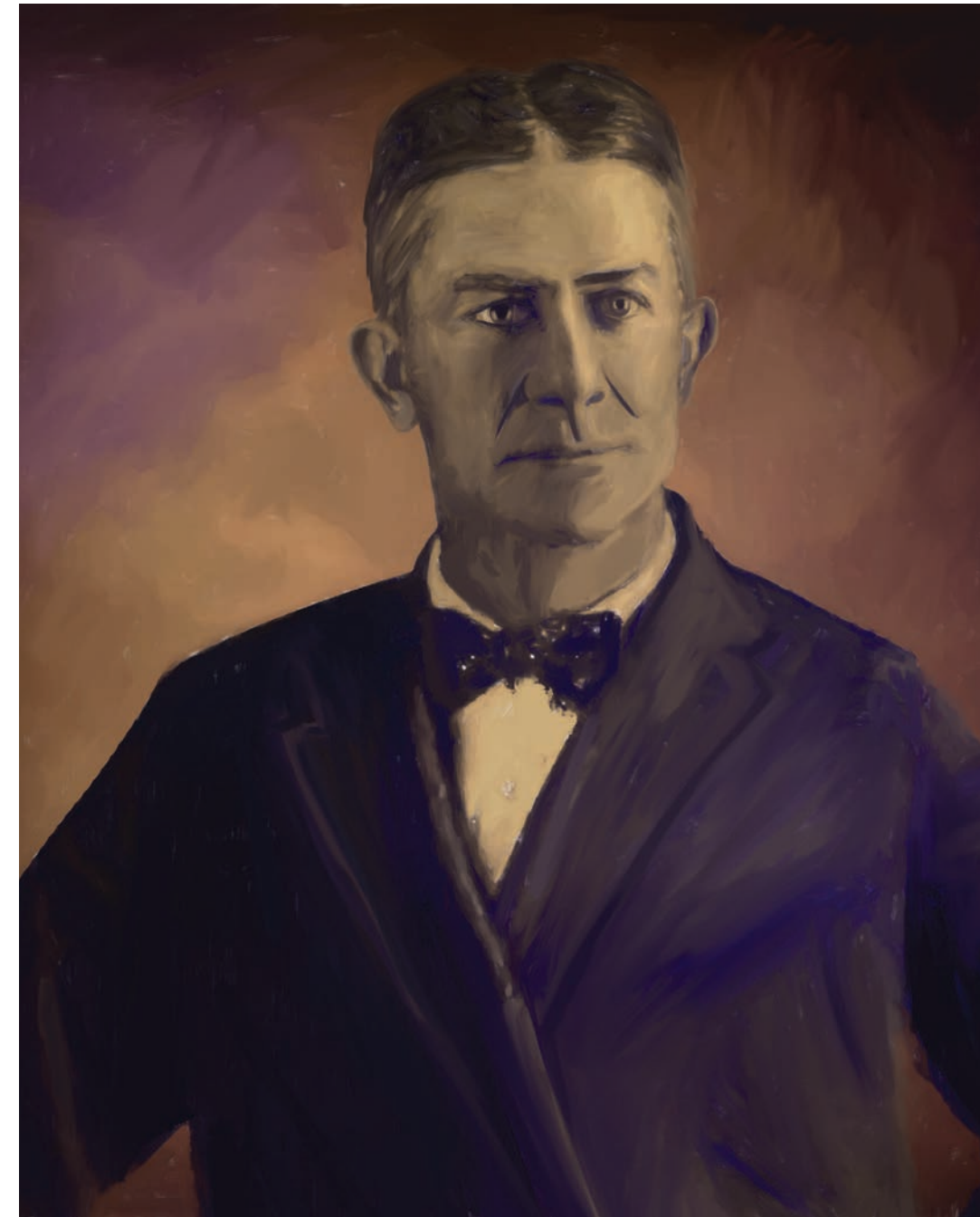
# From the New Cornelia to Modern-Day Resilience

*Ajo's transformation from desert crossroads, to model company town, to present-day vibrancy comes with a dose of humility and a deep sense of authenticity.*

*La transformación de Ajo de la encrucijada del desierto, a la ciudad modelo de la compañía, a la vitalidad actual viene con una dosis de humildad y un profundo sentido de autenticidad.*

## The Greenways

John Campbell Greenway (1872 – 1926) is sometimes called the founder of Ajo for his role in establishing the New Cornelia Mine. A former Rough Rider who served alongside Theodore Roosevelt at the Battle of San Juan Hill, Greenway pioneered new mining methods and oversaw modern Ajo's early development.



His wife Isabella Greenway (1886 – 1953) earned renown as the first female Congresswoman from Arizona and founder of the Arizona Inn in Tucson. Her persuasiveness helped bring economic relief to Arizona during the Great Depression. A lifelong friend of the Roosevelt family, she spoke in support of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's presidential nomination at the 1932 Democratic National Convention.

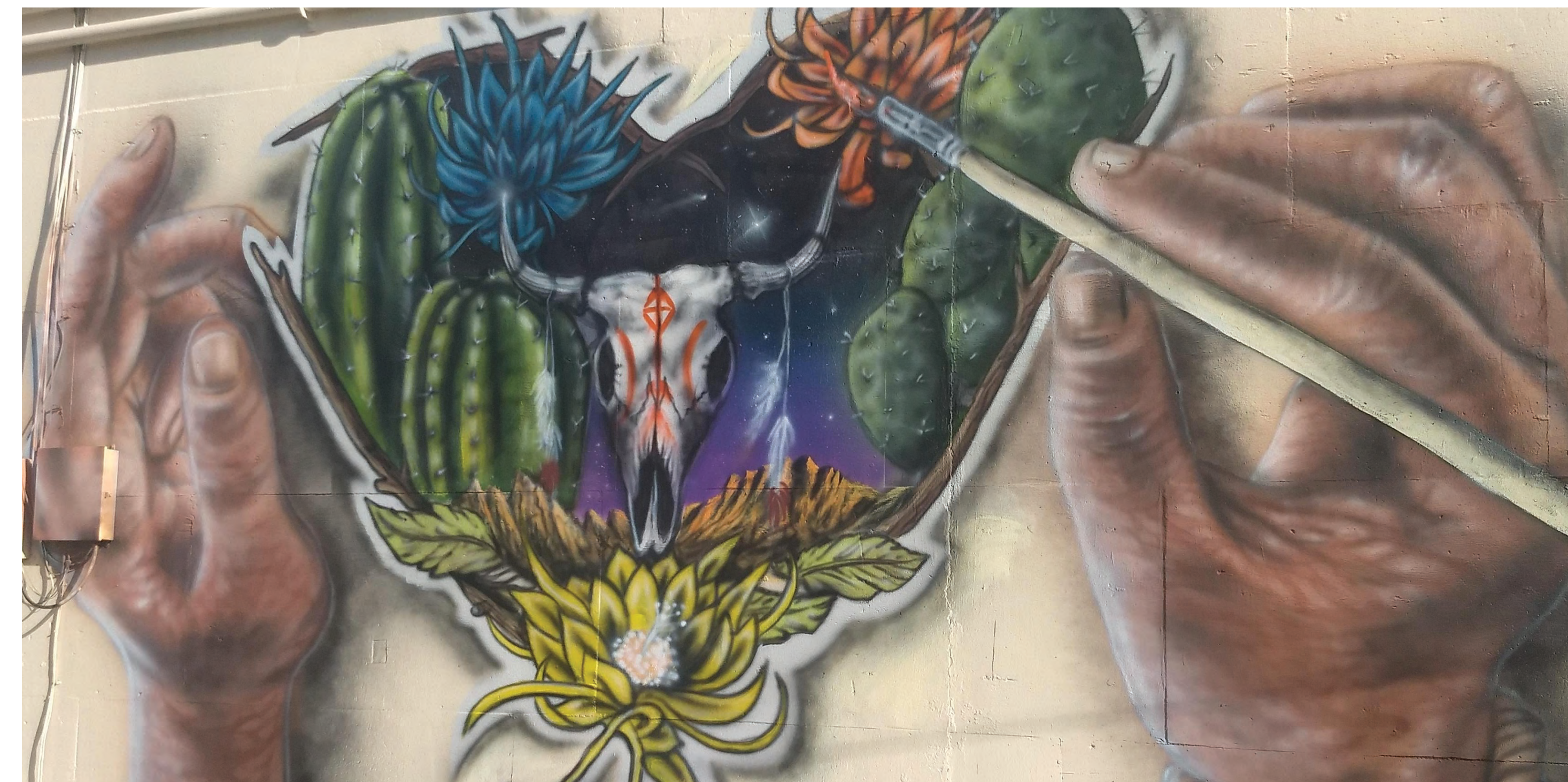


## Copper Mining Ups and Downs

At its peak, the New Cornelia Mine was the third largest copper producer in the world. The New Cornelia Branch of Phelps Dodge provided nearly all community services for 70 years, similar to many single industry company towns. The mine shuttered in 1985 due to plummeting copper prices and tensions between labor and management. It marked a sharp departure from the past and ultimately reduced the population of Ajo by half.

## A Resurgence from the Ground Up

The closure left challenges in its wake including limited jobs and services. Ajo's unique buildings and community bonds began to fall into disrepair. As the community searched for a way forward, the International Sonoran Desert Alliance was formed in 1993 with a mission to preserve and enrich the environment, culture and economy of the Sonoran Desert. Driven by a vision for more resilient and sustainable desert communities that celebrate art, culture and conservation excellence, the Alliance has been working with diverse partners to create a prosperous, post-extractive future.



Local art and sustainable food production take center stage in Ajo.



The International Day of Peace, held on September 21 each year, is one of several signature events that celebrate community.



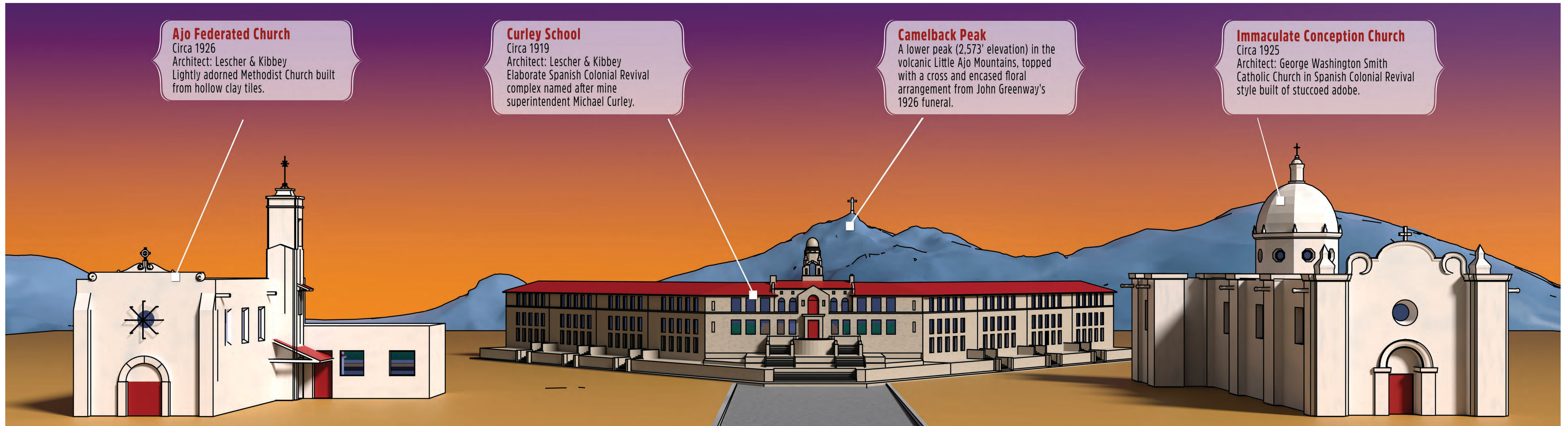
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# Ajo's Spanish Colonial Revival Heart

The graceful symmetry of Ajo's town center is visible at the west end of the plaza, where a pair of historic churches frame the Curley School and Camelback Peak. The collection is a showcase of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture, a style fashionable in the early 20th century.

La elegante simetría del centro de la ciudad de Ajo es visible en el extremo oeste de la plaza, donde un par de iglesias históricas enmarcan la Escuela Curley y el Pico Camelback. La colección es un escaparate de la arquitectura del renacimiento colonial español, un estilo de moda a principios del siglo XX.



## The Roots of Spanish Colonial Revival Architecture

Architectural "revival styles" borrow from past, often distant cultures. These styles became popular throughout the United States between 1890 and 1930. Elements of Spanish Colonial Revival style are on display throughout Ajo; they include arched windows and doors, plain wall surfaces, tiled roofs and decorative chimney and window coverings.



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