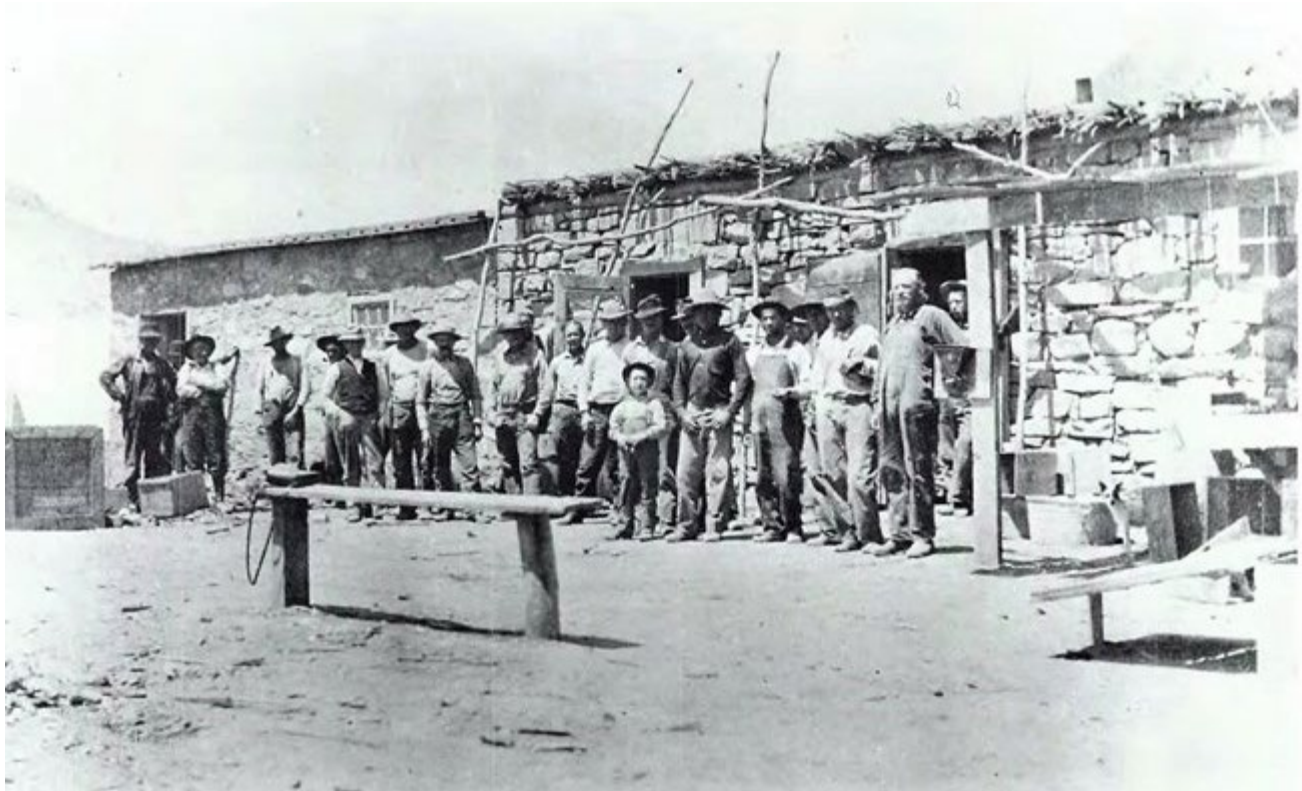




ARTICLE

Archeology and Industry: Gold Mining in Glen Canyon

Glen Canyon National Recreational Area contains many layers of history. Starting over 11,500 years ago, various groups including Native Americans, Mormons, Spanish friars, miners, and pioneers have moved through the canyon. Archeologists can use the materials these individuals left behind to learn more about their lives.



Spencer's crew in front of Lee's Ferry fort.

Carrell, Bradford, and Rusho, Fig. 3.1

Archeologists explore both the canyon's deep and recent past. In the late 19th and early 20th century, a Gold Rush occurred along the Colorado River. Large companies, such as the Zahn Brothers and Hoskaninni Company, began mining the areas in and around Glen Canyon. Several individuals tried their luck as well. Charles Harvey Spencer (b. 1872) was one of these mining entrepreneurs. Starting in December of 1909, he and his crew (composed of mining specialists, laborers, and cooks) established a small camp by the San Juan River. In May 1910, the camp moved to the more productive area of Lee's Ferry within the modern-day National Recreational Area. There, they established a permanent camp, some remains of which can still be seen today.

The camp contained many buildings, including three bunkhouses, a mess hall/kitchen with a fireplace, a



1963 view with remains of the Charles H. Spencer steamboat in the foreground, an old ferry road, and USGS buildings.

Carrell, Bradford, and Rusho, Fig. 3.25

separate cook's house, a blacksmith shop, and a laboratory. Archeologists use both historic photographs and evidence in the ground to identify these buildings. They also located two root cellar holes not shown in the photographs. These cellars possibly belong to two small houses where married workers and their wives lived. The mining venture was abandoned in 1912, and many of these buildings were destroyed in the following decades.

However, both the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and the National Park Service (NPS) modified and adapted some of the structures for housing and storage. In 1967, NPS began preserving the two original Spencer buildings that remained.

Along with these structures, archeologists at Glen Canyon located artifacts and features directly connected to Spencer's mining business. These include two boilers, 18 flume support pieces, a hose piece, and two small cuts or platforms on the hill slope where sleds or frames for monitors or hose nozzles were placed for the sluicing process. The Charles H. Spencer paddle-wheel steamboat transported coal in for the boilers from the Warm Creek mine, 28 miles away.



Charles H. Spencer steamboat in 1912 (left) and 1963 (right).

Carrell, Bradford, and Rusho, Figs. 6.2 and 6.5

Archeologists with the NPS Submerged Cultural Resources Unit investigated this steamship in the 1980's. The boat was built in 1911 in the Shultze, Robertson, Shultze South San Francisco shipyard. Over the course of six months, it was dismantled, transported, and reassembled at Warm Creek. While multiple oral accounts exist referencing it (including those within the 1929 Supreme Court case *U.S. v Utah*), it is still unclear how many trips it took between Warm Creek and Spencer's mine at Lee Fort. What is clear is that the boat made its last journey between the mine and Lee Fort sometime in the spring or summer of 1912. It was then tied up on the river bank. Archeologists studying the now-submerged wreck determined that at some point after that the boat slid sideways from the bank, struck a large boulder, and sank. Parts of its upper deck were then salvaged, as evident by sawmarks in its framing.

Over the past decades, archeologists have monitored the wreck and other materials from the Spencer mining era. Today, visitors to the Glen Canyon Recreational Area can walk down the interpretive trail and view the remains. While just over 100 years old rather than thousands, these materials offer insight into an important era within Glen Canyon's long history.

Resources

[Glen Canyon](#). National Park Service.

Carrell, Toni, ed., James E. Bradford, and W.L. Rusho. Submerged Cultural Resources Site Report: Charles H. Spencer Mining Operation and Paddle Wheel Steamboat. Southwest Cultural Resources Professional Papers No. 13. Southwest Cultural Resources Center, National Park Service, 1987.

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