

## CHANCE COBWEB HALL

## THE MYSTERIOUS BAR BABY



Photo from the Sharlot Hall Archives

By Elisabeth F. Ruffner

One of the first books about Prescott was written by Edmund Wells in his later years. Wells had arrived in the Prescott basin as a youth of 18, travelling with his father in a wagon train from Lancaster, Ohio, his place of birth. The youth worked harvesting trees to build the first structures, including Fort Whipple. He studied and worked diligently, and eventually became a clerk in the First Territorial Legislative Assembly meeting on September 24, 1864.

As a distinguished lawyer and citizen of the town, Judge Wells - in his book "Argonaut Tales," published in 1927 when he was 81-years-old, wrote accounts of the earliest days of the town and the inhabitants. A fable about a baby left in a bar one snowy night in Prescott had been recorded in several historic accounts and until Leo W. Banks, a contemporary author cleared the facts from

fiction, Chance Cob Web Hall had long been accepted as the name of an infant left on a bar in Prescott in 1898.

The Prescott newspaper of January 21, 1898 reported that "Decidedly the sensation of the season occurred in the Cabinet Saloon last evening when a woman laid the baby on the bar and walked out before the astonished bar-keep could sufficiently recover himself to say a word."

A state newspaper of the time reported that the infant's fate was sealed when she was won in a card game and "the judge [who] finally captured the prize assured the unsuccessful men that he would invest the \$300 he won in the 'game' that evening for the child's benefit."

According to Banks, Edmund Wells wrote the story placing the event in the Cob Web Saloon, and recorded the

judge's name as Hall rather than Hicks in his book "Argonaut Tales." Bank suggests that Wells' memory failed him, or possibly, he deliberately embroidered the story as to the location and the name of the baby's rescuer.

The facts, as collected by Banks from original sources, reveal that the family of the baby was known and that the father had been drinking in the saloon before the incident, but not that night. Mr. Bell, the father, was later convicted of abandonment and served jail time, but meanwhile, Baby Bell was adopted legally by the judge and his wife, and given the name of Violet Hicks. The identity of the woman who left the baby in the bar was never ascertained.

The girl enjoyed a happy and well-tended childhood in Prescott, and later moved to Oakland, California, where she married an architectural sculptor, named Arthur Binner. The tale spun by Wells had the young lady going to Mills College in Oakland, and later, bearing the name Chance Cob Web Hall, telling a gentleman from Prescott visiting in San Francisco, whom she met purely by chance, that she had been known as C.C.Hall during her growing up years.

Now that the history is recorded correctly, The Cabinet Saloon, not the Cob Web, finds a place in the early days of Prescott, and the woman written about so fancifully, actually lived for many years as Violet Alice Binner, had a husband and family, and died at age 72 in Redwood City, California.