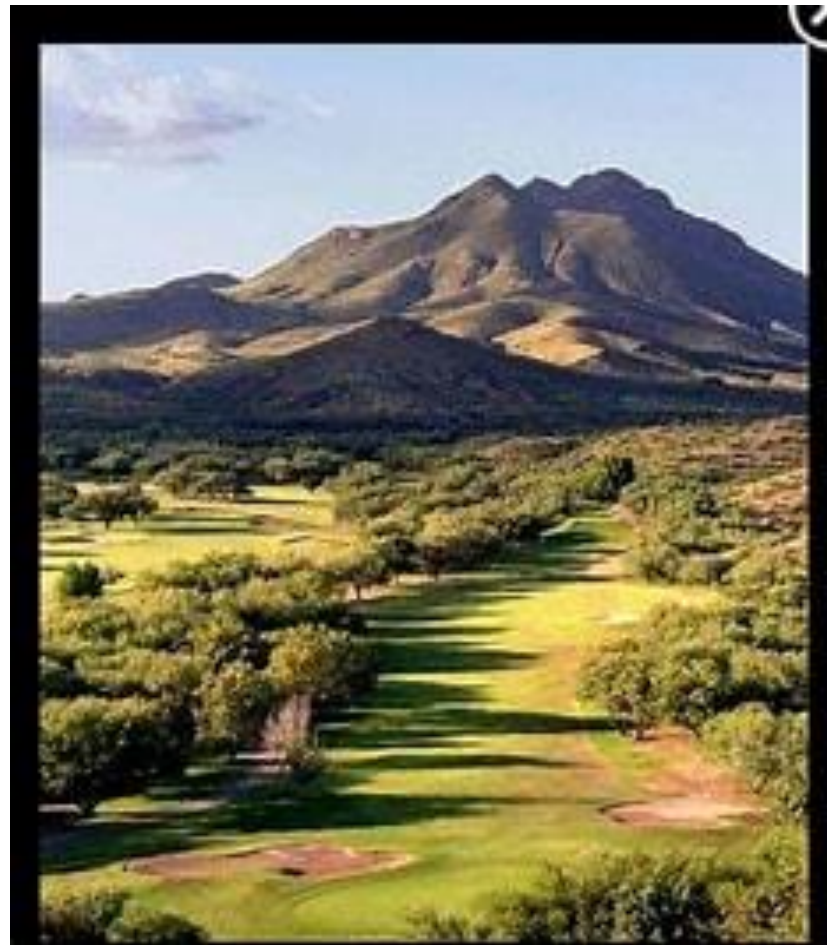


# Rio Rico's History as Santa Cruz County's Suburb



# Key Facts about Rio Rico

As of 2020 U.S. Census, Rio Rico's population has surpassed the population of the city of Nogales! Since the 1970's, Rio Rico has continued to develop as an unincorporated suburban community.

It is known as ***a bedroom community***, that is a suburb where most of the people commute to another city for work.

The demographics include: 87% are hispanic / latino ancestry, 11% percent of Rio Ricans are non – Hispanic Whites, and .41% are Native Americans.



# Employment

Rio Rico is located near a large commercial port of entry for produce distribution between two nations in Nogales. This has allowed employment to grow dramatically.

***Other employment opportunities include:***

Office/ administrative jobs  
- 15.6%

Sales and operations –  
12.2%

Healthcare – 6.17%

Law enforcement – 5%



# Rio Rico Beginnings

The indigenous people living along the Santa Cruz River were the first to occupy the *Pimeria Alta* (northern Sonora and southern Arizona). This included the Sobaipuri, Hohokam, O'odham and then the Apaches. They practiced agricultural methods such as irrigation and crop farming.

- Early History of Rio Rico





## Next were the Spanish and Missionary Communities

The Spanish explorers, like Coronado, were here in the 1540's. After the Sobaipuri Revolt in 1540, the Spanish did not return till the 1690's. In 1691, Father Eusebio Kino created three Catholic mission communities in and around Rio Rico. Two were located near the river and the other was built on a rocky ridge for defense purposes. Tumacacori and Guevavi were located near the river and ***Mission San Cayento de Calabasas*** ( an extension of Tumacacori) served as a stock ranch and had a small chapel.



# Violent attacks occasionally left the missions abandoned

The Pima Revolt ( 1751-1752) between the Spanish and the O'odham eventually left the Guevavi mission abandoned, but it was later rebuilt on 1753.

The community at Tumacacori eventually moved out of the region due to constant attacks from the Apache.

In 1786, *San Cayetano de Calabazas* was abandoned by the O'odham and the Spanish, but continued to be used by vaqueros and cowboys as a stock ranch between the years of 1807-1830. In 1844, the mission was sold to Manuel Gandara, Governor of Sionora for about \$500. In 1854 with the Gadsden Purchase, the land that the Calabazas mission was on became the property of the United States.



# History of Calabasas

Before the purchase of Calabasas to **Colonel Charles P. Sykes**, the town had a general store, polling place, and a post office. This was primarily due to the close proximity of Ft. Mason. The ranches in the area supplied hay to Ft. Mason.

Col Sykes purchased Calbasas from Gandara in 1878 and established the Calabasas Land & Mining Company. As luck would have it, in 1882, The NM & AZ Railroad crossed right through Calbasas. Calabasas soon grew into a “boom town” with 16 saloons, a US Customs House and three hotels, the most famous being the **Santa Rita Hotel**. The town would soon adopt the name “Hell’s Hollow” with violence surpassing Tombstone!

- The Town of Calabasas and Colonel Charles P. Sykes



# The Baca Float #3 Dispute

***The Big question rooted in this dispute was who legally owned the land where Rio Rico was located.*** What happened was that after the Mexican War Of Independence in 1821, Luis Maria Baca was given 500,000 acres by the Viceroy of Spain. He broke it into 5 – 100,000 acre parcels; two in New Mexico, two in Arizona and one in Colorado. After the Gadsden Purchase in 1854 the land becomes the property of the United States. The United States gave Baca Float #3 is one of the five gifts that the US government gave to the Baca heirs in 1864 as compensation for the land Luis Maria Baca lost in the land dispute. That land was quickly bought by out of state businessman who engaged in land fraud.





# More to the story...

A long legal dispute over the land began. After Gadsden, many Mexican and American families unknowingly started small homesteads within the Baca Float #3.

Meanwhile, in 1878 Gandara an attorney for the Baca heirs ( who acquired the land for compensation by the Baca Family for representing them in court) sells the land to Colonel Sykes. When the railroad changed its route through Calabasas, the town slowly began to die. People left the town moving north to Tucson or south to Mexico. The Santa Rita Hotel would be used by the military as headquarters and eventually it would be converted into a hay barn. Eventually the hotel would burn to the ground.

- Baca Float #3 ( cont.)



# Conclusion to the BACA Float # 3

In 1917, The US Supreme Court awards the businessman, not the local ranching families the Baca Float #3 **land grant**, (remember a land grant is an allotment of public land to a certain group of people). The court ordered the families living in the area to move elsewhere. Many of the families refused and were forcibly removed by the US Marshalls. In 1921, the US Congress passed a law titled; “ An Act for the Relief of Settlers” which allowed the settlers to relocate on land in Buckeye, Arizona.

According to Steve Gastellum, historian and descendant of one of those families evicted from the Baca Float #3, he is not sure how many people, if any, benefitted from the law.

- Steve Gastellum, historian and descendant is seen on the far right.



- Modern Development

## Enter the Gulf American Corporation

Eventually, the Baca Float #3 was sold in 1967 to Gulf American Corp (GAC) by Tol Pendleton previous owner of the Float. At that time the name of Calabasas was changed to Rio Rico by the new owners.

GAC at the time was one of the largest companies in the State of Florida, In 1966, the GAC planned to develop Rio Rico with a budget of 150 million dollars. It was approved for 8900 acres to be zoned.

Unfortunately, the GAC had been involved in scandalous land fraud practices in Florida and eventually was found guilty. The GAC sells out to General Acceptance Corporation a subsidiary of GAC.



## Present & Future of Rio Rico, Arizona

Rio Rico has expanded with more people moving into the area. This has created a boost for the businesses and produce companies; not only to sell their wares but to allocate their companies for labor.

Tourism has increased in the last few years and now there are plans to create a “***Vitality District.***” This would allow residents to have more access to necessities and entertainment without travelling to Nogales or Tucson. Public transportation, sidewalks and plazas would increase accessibility. With the unique beauty of Rio Rico’s flora and fauna, natural areas, hiking trails and parks would allow for greater outdoor enjoyment.

