

History of Yuma, Arizona

The area's first settlers were Native American tribes whose descendants now occupy the Cocopah and Quechan reservations. In 1540, expeditions under Hernando de Alarcon and Melchior Diaz visited the area and immediately saw the natural crossing of the Colorado River as an ideal spot for a city. Later military expeditions that crossed the Colorado River at the Yuma Crossing include Juan Bautista de Anza (1774), the Mormon Battalion (1848) and the California Column (1862).

Following the establishment of Fort Yuma, a town sprang up on the New Mexico (now Arizona) side of the Colorado. The town site was duly registered in San Diego, which could not have been done if both banks of the Colorado River just below its junction with the Gila had not been recognized as being within the jurisdiction of the State of California. The county of San Diego collected taxes from there for many years. The town, initially called Colorado City was renamed Arizona City in 1858 and took the name Yuma in 1873.

From the 1850's through the 1870's, the Yuma Crossing was known for its steamboat crossing, and spot for them to stop on the way up and down the river. The steamboats transported passengers and equipment for the various mines and military outposts. The Yuma Quartermaster Depot, today a state historic park, supplied all forts in present-day Arizona as well large parts of New Mexico, and Colorado. Yuma served as the gateway to the new Republic (later State) of California, as it was one of the few natural spots to cross the very wide Colorado River.