

CARRILLO GARDENS

1885-1903

Leopoldo Carrillo was a wealthy rancher and businessman of early Tucson. He owned many properties and traveled from Mexico to the west coast. In his travels he saw the beautiful gardens of California. He fashioned Tucson's first public park after those places. Carrillo's Gardens covered eight acres with 500 peach trees, 2000 grape vines, 200 quinces, 60 pomegranates and 9 apricots. His rose garden was one of the finest in Tucson.

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AHS/Tucson #18997



Courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society/Tucson # 17795

FOLKLORE

The water for the lakes is gone. Where did it go? A local folktale entitled "The Devil in Carrillo Gardens" explains the mysterious disappearance. The heroine is a disobedient but beautiful girl. She sneaks out her bedroom window to the Carrillo dance hall and dances with a handsome stranger. Unbeknownst to her she is dancing with the devil. When, to her horror, she discovers the truth, his fire and awful smell evaporates the water in Carrillo Gardens.

Leopoldo was a man of adventure and vision. He constructed the first fired-brick building in Tucson. He owned several homes, a ranch west of the Santa Cruz and one at Sabino Canyon. He leased many acres of farmland by the Santa Cruz River to Chinese farmers.

Carrillo's Garden featured three spring-fed ponds with two boats. Carrillo's children charged for boat rides on the lakes. He had nine children by his first wife, Jesusita. She had been born in Mexico, of a wealthy Spanish family. It is said her father did not approve of her marrying a man who was half Indian so made an impossible dowry (marriage fee)- Jesusita's weight in gold. They were married.

The park had twelve bath houses, a saloon, shooting gallery, restaurant, dance hall, zoo and circus. The first ice cream was sold at a time when there was no electricity. Cost of ice cream in 1870 was \$5.00 a quart. People were entertained with hot air balloon rides, music and dancing. This beautiful oasis attracted the highest society of Tucson.

