

# EL OJITO – LITTLE EYE SPRING

## Prehistoric

You will not see water here today. The spring has long ago slipped beneath the earth, twisted by an earthquake in 1887 and drained by the thirsty population of a growing Tucson.

Earliest maps mark this site for explorers of the Southwest. The spring gave a year-round supply of water. El Ojito supplied the soldiers in the Presidio before wells were dug within the fort. At El Ojito, guards were necessary to protect the people from the Apaches when they were gathering water and washing clothes.

In the late 1800's, Simpson Baths took the water from the spring, heated it and provided a bathing opportunity for the men of Tucson. It was said that all social levels of men frequented the baths, conducting business while soaking in the metal tubs. Women were not allowed at the baths—they had to haul water to their homes.



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**FOLKLORE/HISTORY** In 1866 a young Civil War soldier named John Spring was sent to Camp Lowell in Tucson. He had earned his citizenship by serving as an American soldier during the Civil War. John discovered that the camp was disposing of old rifle cartridges and that gave him an idea. He hatched a plan to sell the ammunition for cold beer. He stole out of camp on the darkest night and headed for town. However, between him and town was El Ojito.

He fell into El Ojito along with all of those old rifle cartridges. He was trying to get out when he heard a big SPLASH! It was his captain. John dropped all of the old cartridges to the bottom of the spring to help his drowning captain out of the water. They walked back to camp together. Later John got more old cartridges and this time he skirted around the spring. He earned ten dollars! He later wrote about this experience in a book where he apologized for his bad behavior.

