

Chapter 1

Arizona 1913: Still the “Wild West”

In November of 1864, the Territorial Legislature created four counties in Arizona Territory: Mohave, Pima, Yavapai and Yuma. In 1867, the Territorial Capital was moved to Tucson, partially because of the isolation of Prescott. The population of the territory in 1870 was estimated at 9,658, again, not counting Indians. By 1880, the population had grown dramatically to more than 40,000 with Pima County experiencing the most growth. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, wagon and stagecoach roads became the major thoroughfares in the territory, linking the major communities and the military posts.



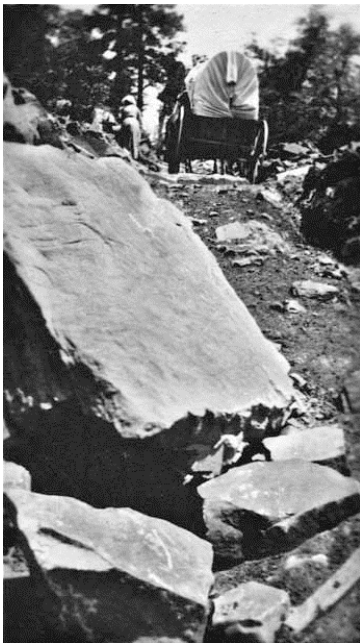
A variety of horse-drawn conveyances were stopped at the Roosevelt Post Office, circa 1900. (Northern Gila County Historical Society)

Freight wagons traversed the territory delivering merchandise. Stagecoaches delivered people; however, the main impetus behind the proliferation of stagecoach lines was the potential for a lucrative contract for the delivery of the United States mail.

As the territory began to be settled in the 1870s and into the 1880s, roads became a high priority. As settlements began to spring up throughout the territory, it was obvious that many of the places that were appealing to the Indigenous People were also appealing to the white man. Many of the new “roads” followed the well-traveled trails of the Native People of the territory—people who had been traversing this vast land for centuries without the benefit of formal roads. These pathways often followed the most usable and reasonable routes between two destinations. The settlers took advantage of the traditional travel routes in establishing their own “trails,” which initially took them by foot or horse-

An Arizona Auto Adventure

back from place to place. Early transportation routes included footpaths, wildlife trails, horse trails, wagon roads, freight roads and, later on, toll roads. Pathways developed into “roads” through use, be it foot traffic, the use of horses, mules, or oxen, or overland travel in wagons or, later on, motorized vehicles. Some of these “roads” probably were intended only for pack animals rather than wagons, and many of the roads were simply too narrow, steep or sandy for freight wagons. Some primitive roads were built mainly to connect the military posts. Most roads were minimally constructed—just enough to make them wide enough for a wagon, buckboard or stagecoach, and safe enough so that the conveyance of choice wouldn’t tip over on the rough and rutted roads or drop off into a canyon where the “roadbed” failed. Given the rapidity with which these roads were “built,” there could have been little more done than identifying and marking them, with any construction efforts focused on areas of difficult terrain. Large boulders were moved out of the way and the brush, cactus and trees were grubbed out. Creek, stream and river crossings were “take-a-chance.” In 1877, the capital was moved back to Prescott, where it remained until it was permanently moved to Phoenix in 1889, evidencing that, by 1877, it was a lot easier to get to Prescott than it had been in 1867.



Bill Back of the Verde Valley struggled up the Strawberry Hill about 1890. (Helen Henderson Cain)