



# Articles dated 1950-1959



## Author Challenges Pioneer Home Story

BY ROBERT C. WILSON

When the November 3, 1947, issue of Life Magazine reached the people of Arizona it created quite a stir in certain circles, particularly in that red brick building on a hilltop in the city of Prescott, known as the Pioneers' Home, and with the Board of Governors of that institution. The reason for this lay in the fact that it contained an illustrated article, by Claude Stanush, which described the inmates of the Home and their manner of life in anything but a favorable manner.

That article was written from the viewpoint of sensationalism rather than relating a true, though perhaps drab story of the founding and operation of this Pioneers' Home, the only one of its kind in the United States.

IT IS PROBABLE that when most Arizonans and the country at large read the article they believed the Home was full of reckless, dissolute, daredevil old characters. The author of the story wrote:

"The Arizona Pioneers are a crusty, cantankerous lot whose only common denominator is that they do not like society generally and each other specifically... the home is about as peaceful as an old frontier saloon. Every week there are at least two or three old fashioned brawls, fought sometimes with bare knuckles, but more often with canes... at least a fourth of the guests have served time in jail or in the penitentiary... they spend most of their allowance for whiskey along the row."

The above are the statements in the Life article that are most strenuously objected to. The plain fact is, that while there is a color of truth in them, they are heavily

overdrawn in the interest of making a sensational wildwest story.

THERE IS NOW, and always has been, a majority of the inmates who are quiet, respectable, well behaved persons. Either through misfortune or preference, they are passing their declining years in the company of people of their own age. Many of them have been lifelong friends.

Over the years, the writer has seen a number of his old-time friends go to the Pioneers' Home. Some of them had sufficient means of their own on which to live elsewhere had they cared to. The attitude of many of the inmates is that they prefer living in the Home rather than become a burden on friends or relatives.

I visited the Home, during the week preceding Christmas, at the invitation of Superintendent James E. (Jim) Griswold. I was taken all through the building and given the opportunity of talking alone with several of my old-time friends. But first, Fran Gerten, assistant superintendent in charge of the office, and Griswold went over the list of the 156 residents with me. I was pleased to find seven or eight whom I knew. Nothing pleases the old-timers more than to have their old friends come to see them.

This Home should not be looked upon as anything in the nature of a poor house. Decidedly it is not that, since everyone who occupies it has complied with the requirement that he or she must have been "active in the development of the state." With almost negligible exceptions the residents contributed to the upbuilding of Arizona in the days when the going was rough and full of hardships and personal discomforts.

TAKE THE CASES of Jim Cash and Mrs. Van Voorhies, for instance, both of whom I knew at least 50 years ago.

Jim, since the early 90's, was active about mining camps as the owner of pack trains carrying supplies to out-

of-the-way mining camps. His was a rough and hard life, but many of the mines depended upon him and his kind for their supplies of food and equipment. Regardless of bad weather, or mishaps and rocky trails, Jim was always on the job and dependable. In later years he trapped wild horses and for awhile was postmaster and caretaker at Castle Hot Springs.

Mrs. Van Voorhies, whom I knew in the years long gone by as Mrs. Billy Jones, when her first husband was alive, traveled from one mining camp to another with her husband. To help eke out a living she ran a miners boarding house in various places. Her meals were famous, and many a "blanket stiff" looking for a job she fed without compensation.

There are many others of the type of these two. And regardless of how crusty and cantankerous a few of the old folks at the Home may be, they deserve care and kindness at the hands of the state. They are approaching trail's end---trails blazed through the burning deserts and the rough mountains of Arizona with burros, wagons, buckboards, saddle horses and afoot. Soon their kind will be seen no more.

**THE IDEA OF** a home for Arizona pioneers, who for one reason or another needed care in their old age, originated with a group of Prescott businessmen toward the close of the territorial days. On Jan. 20, 1909, George D. Norris of that city introduced a bill in the last territorial legislature for the creation of a Pioneers' Home to be located at Prescott. The bill passed both houses and was signed by Governor Kibbey. It carried an appropriation of \$25,000 for the construction of buildings and the maintenance of the Home for the years 1909-10. Maj. A.J. Doran was placed in charge of construction and later became the Home's first superintendent. The site was donated by Frank Murphy, and later donations enlarged the grounds to their present size.

From this small beginning with housing for only 25 persons, including a small staff, the Home has grown through succeeding appropriations, to a large four-story brick building. It houses 156 aged persons, 63 of whom are women and 93 men. The oldest man there at present is 96 and the oldest woman 99.

A staff of 28 includes six nurses who are kept busy with real and fancied ailments of these old folks. Ordinary cases are treated at the Home by a local physician or the nurses. Surgery is performed in the Prescott Community Hospital. Eye cases, principally cataracts, are sent to Phoenix.

Originally the Home was planned for broken-down miners only, but now any person past 60 who has lived in Arizona 35 years, has been active in its development, and is unable to provide for himself, is eligible. This does not mean necessarily that one has to be financially distressed for eligibility. Many are admitted because they are too old and infirm to take care of themselves. However, those admitted who have funds of their own do not receive the \$7.50 allowance monthly for spending money.

