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69 Years of Caring --- Prescott Pioneer Home

By Mary Ellen Dyer

She looks over the city with the calm and stoicism of advancing age. Mellowed with understanding and harmony, she has the usual aging problems that need to be rectified. But she survives – and is beautiful.

The grand old lady is the Pioneer Home, and she has been nurturing retired pioneers since February, 1911.

Initially the stately red brick, three-story building housed disabled and retired miners --- and was definitely confined to the male population. Ladies did not move onto the premises until 1916, when funds for a women's addition were provided from the will of W.C. Parsons.

Fifty more beds were added in 1919, and a final addition in 1955 brought the home capacity to 180 beds.

Technically the home is a combination of the Arizona Hospital for Disabled Miners and a home for Arizona pioneers of 30 years or more who are at least 65 years of age. Persons applying must be U.S. citizens, have resided in the state for the last five years, be ambulatory and able to care for themselves. Cost is determined by the applicant's ability to pay.

Once in the home, contentment is usually based on whether the residents wanted or were forced to move in. Self-motivated applicants are delighted with the accommodations, the friendliness and caring of the staff. The superior food is served at small tables family style.

Part-time staffer Corinne Gadarowski is in charge of recreation for infirmary residents, but she knows the name of each

person walking, rolling or limping past her in the hall. Although Corinne is only paid part-time, she works a full day. Her care for the patients keeps her occupied long past the time she is supposed to go home.

Resident Curt Scurlock was busy putting on tapes and adjusting knobs on his intricate recording equipment for the dance class. Two couples moved at a dignified pace on the dance floor to the music of Glenn Miller's "Moonlight Serenade"; Curt smiled and went back to his work. He records music for many of the Home functions.

"The man playing the music (Curt) lives here with his wife," said Corinne. They have been married over 50 years, I believe."

Later Curt revealed the story of nursing his wife Anna back to health after a stroke had completely paralyzed her left side a couple of years ago. "I'd go down to the infirmary three times a day and exercise her the way they showed me at the hospital," said Curt. "The aides weren't too happy having me show up at 5:30 every morning, but I went in anyway," he added grinning.

He reached over and patted his wife as she smiled at him from her reclining chair. "She can do everything now but get out of bed," he said, nodding his head in the direction of the bars over Anna's head.

The Scurlocks love the Pioneers Home; they moved in about six years ago. Most of their married life, however, was spent in a seven-room log house built by the couple and their neighbors on a 160-acre homestead outside Williams. "It was mostly rocks," said Curt. "But we cleared 40 acres."

Devoted to each other, Curt and Anna both enthusiastically agree that "this is a wonderful place" and they never lack for things to do.

Another resident, Grace Combs, has a spacious room on the third floor where she lives alone. Grace lit

up a cigarette and took time off from doing some work for Gussie Wood in order to answer questions about her life at the home. Sharp and witty, Grace concedes there are moments of boredom, but they don't happen often. "They won't let you lay down and die here," she said with a grin and a glance at Corinne, who gets the patients involved in the varied programs of music, movies, dances, exercise classes and church services offered.

Grace is one of the ambulatory residents involved in the program Corinne initiated called "Pioneer Pals." The pals pick one or more residents in the infirmary to befriend. Grace visits five patients. "This has really been a good program," said Corinne. "Most of the residents are afraid of the infirmary. They think of it as a place to go and die." The program has helped alleviate some of these fears.

Grace glanced at her watch and said she had to head down for mail call. All the residents gather at 11:15 in the lobby and not a rocking chair is empty as each person waits for his or her name to be called. It's always good to hear from family or friends.



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Arizona Pioneers' Home ---

By KIMBERLY SIMKO
The Prescott Courier

In February of 1911, Judge N.L. Griffin walked up a winding trail to the top of a granite outcropping in west Prescott and through the just-opened doors of a newly built brick structure.

He was home.

“...he went to the northwest corner of the first floor and threw his effects into that room where he said he would ‘camp’ for the remainder of his days...moments later (Louis B.) St. James came along, and after taking the ‘tracks’ of his Hassayampa colleague, pulled on the latch string and said it looked good to him, and believed he would ‘bunk’ with the judge again, just as they had done on the Lynx Creek away back in 1863.” (1)

Griffin, St. James, William Baxter and Patrick Donlan, known as the “deserving Hassayampers,” were the first to enroll in the Arizona Pioneers’ Home. The four long-time Yavapai County residents were also noted as among the first to enter the Arizona Territory, “away back in the perilous days of the (18)60’s.” (2)

More than three-quarters of a century later, the Home --- still perched above Prescott on its original foundation --- is Arizona’s only state-operated retirement home for miners, pioneers and long-time residents of the state.

The idea for the home came about when three Prescott men, Major A.J. Doran, Johnny Duke and Frank Murphy, reportedly saw an indigent Arizonan and “their hearts went out to him,” explained Home Activity Director Corine Gadarowski. “They had an idea to open a sanctuary for Arizona pioneers. Originally it was a place for oldtimers who found themselves without funds.”

Doran, a state legislator, saw fit to address his colleagues and provide for creation of the Home through Legislative means. A bill was first introduced during the 24th Legislature, then re-introduced on Jan. 20, 1909 by Yavapai County’s George Morris. Arizona Gov. Joseph H. Kibbey signed the Arizona Pioneer Home Bill on March 11, 1909. (3)

“...Major Doran was elected a member of the Council of the 24th Legislature from Yavapai County... In this session, he introduced a bill providing for an Arizona Pioneer Home (1907) at Prescott which passed both houses unanimously, but failed

to receive the Governor’s approval. The 25th Legislature (1909) however, passed the bill, Gov. Kibbey signed it and appointed Major Doran superintendent of construction, and after completion of the building (he) retained this office until 1912...” (4)

Originally, \$25,000 was appropriated for construction and furnishing of the building. Another \$30,000 was set aside for maintenance of the Home from 1909 to 1910. The 4 ½ acre site on which it stands was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Frank M. Murphy and Mr. T.G. Norris of Prescott. (5)

According to the Feb. 7, 1911 *Prescott Journal-Miner*, the facility was equipped to house 40 residents, all male, when it first opened.

However, past newspaper clippings kept pressed between the pages of an old scrapbook at the Home tell us construction of the womens’ wing was completed five years later, on April 8. funds to cover costs of the \$30,000 addition were willed by another Prescott pioneer, W.C. Parsons, according to Ms. Gadarowski.

During the years, other wings have been added, including a 50-bed addition in 1919 and more in 1956. current capacity is about 180 beds, she said.

Also included later within its walls was the Hospital for Disabled Miners, said to have originally been designed for pioneers who had been active in developing mines throughout the state. Both facilities were placed under the supervision of the Governor-appointed Home superintendent. (6)

The facility has been home to a number of well-known Arizonans throughout the years, who not only saw the development of the Arizona Territory and its many cities and towns, but also contributed to the state’s development.

In 1955, Mrs. Ella Mulvenon passed away within its walls at the age of 88. She had been preceded in death by her husband, Yavapai

County Sheriff William Mulvenon. (7)

Long-time Thespian Henry Cate died at the Home when he was 86. cate came to the Territory of Arizona in 1906 to settle “in the little town of Phoenix,” and became a lifetime member of the Phoenix Little Theater. (8)

Described as “author, sculptor, preserver of Indian lore and photographer of early day scenes,” Miss Kate Thompson Cory died at the home at the age of 97. A 47-year Prescott resident, Miss Cory moved into the home in 1956. (9)

The last surviving member of the Yavapai County Board of Supervisors responsible for construction of the county courthouse, Henry John Suder, termed “one of Prescott’s most beloved citizens” died at the home when he was 88. Suder came to Prescott in 1890, and became a Home resident in 1957. (10)

At the age of 89, Kitty Lee died at the home in 1955. Mrs. Lee was the wife of songwriter Powder River Jack Lee, credited with the Western hit *Red River Valley*. Together, the Lees worked the Orpheum vaudeville circuit for 15 years and dedicated another 22 years to the entertainment world. (11)

The Home has been the focus of attention from the media, and state and national leaders as well.

Some 1,500 people are said to have attended the Phoenix-based Pioneer Reunion on April 16, 1946. A message from President Harry S. Truman was read at the gathering by Charles A. Stauffer, chairman of the board of the Arizona Publishing Co. (12)

And, in 1953 Superintendent James Griswold received a letter from Arizona Gov. George Howard Pyle, requesting facts about the history of the home. According to Pyle, the Business and Professional Women’s Club of Prescott had expressed interest in producing a 30-

minute public interest broadcast program about the home.

Gov. Pyle's letter has been laid to rest in one of the Home's many scrapbooks, among numerous request letters from various media representatives interested in the Home's history.

Ms. Gadarowski said she admires the spirits of the old-time Arizonans to whom she dedicates her attention every day. Though signs of age are now visible, they were once vibrant youths who spent their lives working in mine shafts, farming the arid Southwest, running cattle and working in cotton fields beneath the summer sun.

The average age of today's 158 residents is 86, Ms. Gadarowski said. John Langham, 104, is the oldest resident and one of four who's surpassed the century mark.

The youngest resident is 69 years old and was just 42 when Vada Vaughn moved into the home 27 years ago. Now 97, Mrs. Vaughn has lived at the facility longer than any of the other residents. (*Note: This was not accurately reported. Vada moved into the Home at age 65, and was a 27 year resident at the time of this article.*)

Thanks to Gussie Wood, Prescotttonians can read about the family gatherings at the Home in every Sunday edition of *The Prescott Courier*. Ms. Gadarowski calls Mrs. Wood "our reporter."

Some residents, however, have no family. Still, Ms. Gadarowski said, "If someone doesn't have a family they never die alone...but people don't come here to die. They come here to live."

Sources

- (1,2) "Prescott Journal-Miner," Feb. 7, 1911
- (3,4) "Who's Who in Arizona," Vol. 1, 1913
- (5-12) Compiled from newspaper clippings contained in scrapbooks at the Home, March 5, 1953.

Following this article:

Seventy-eight years later...

Today's Arizona Pioneer Home provides its residents with a variety of activities and services ranging from a beauty and barber shop open five days a week, to laundry and dining facilities, an interdenominational chapel and health care.

The 60-bed infirmary can accommodate short and long-term residents who become ill or infirmed. Meanwhile, staff physicians hold clinics on a weekly basis for examinations. For emergency needs, physicians are on call 24 hours a day.

A 70-person nursing staff tends to patients' needs, while a fully stocked pharmacy and full-time pharmacist are located within the facility.

Two full-time activities specialists are employed by the state and provide residents with a variety of events, including dancing, games and Saturday night movies.

Doris Marlowe, appointed by the Governor, is the Home's superintendent. All other employees are hired by the state.

Residents must meet certain requirements to live in the Home. He or she must be at least 65 years old, been an Arizona resident for 30 or more years, and a United States citizen and Arizona resident for at least five years. Residents must pass a 60-day probation period.

To qualify as a disabled miner, the individual must be at least 60 years of age, a U.S. citizen and a resident of Arizona while employed by the mining industry. Miners are accepted regardless of their health and do not have a probation period.

Monthly payment for care is determined for each individual according to his or her income and ability to pay. Costs are not to exceed the maximum state set amount of \$1,610 per month.

