

History

Regionally, historical records can be traced back to nomadic hunters from the Great Plains who made their way to the Little Colorado River approximately 12,000 years ago. As a result, the Anasazi culture was born and spread across the Colorado Plateau, which encompasses a large part of Coconino County. By the 1600s, tribes consisted of the Hopi, Havasupai, Pai (Yavapai and Walapai), and the Paiutes.



The area continued to develop and prosper over the next few hundred years. As in any area, there are certain recognizable pioneer families in the community. These names began to surface in our area in the 1850s when military expeditions passed through the area between the Little Colorado River and the Verde River. In 1851, Captain Lorenzo Sitgreaves of the Army Corps of Topographical Engineers mapped a wagon road through the area and, today, Sitgreaves National Forest honors his memory.

In 1857, Edward F. Beale, an ex-Navy Lieutenant, led an expedition to survey the unexplored territory between El Paso, Texas and the Colorado River, which was later most notably associated with the legendary "Camel Experiment." The "U.S. Camel Corps" was born on March 3, 1855, when Congress appropriated \$30,000 for the project that funded the procurement of camels to be used by the U.S. Army in the "Great American Desert." Beale was allotted 25 camels and they proved to be worthwhile despite their foul smell, bad tempers, and kicking and spitting. The camels were "retired" in 1863 and Beale was honored with a wagon road named after him.

In the spring of 1869, Major John Wesley Powell endured a 99 day, 1,500 mile Colorado River boating expedition. He was successful in creating a geographic and topographical survey of the Colorado River, much of which flows through Coconino County, and in heightening awareness of the dangers of extinction the native Indian cultures were facing. The expedition elevated Powell in the eyes of the scientific community and cemented his place in our regional history.

During the 1870s and 1880s, settlers were migrating into the region from the north. Mormon settlers first set up camp at Lee's Ferry on the Colorado River and continued on to Fredonia, Jacob's Lake, Tuba City, and Mormon Lake. In 1883, the Atlantic & Pacific Railroad was completed across Arizona and on to points west. At that time, logging and cattle ranching were major industries in the area. In the early 1890s, five Babbitt brothers made their way from Cincinnati, Ohio to Flagstaff, Arizona. Today, the Babbitt family is rooted in local business, government, and activism in the community. One of our most famous citizens, Bruce Babbitt, is the current U.S. Secretary of Interior and his brother Paul is serving his third term on the Coconino County Board of Supervisors.



Early Coconino County

Coconino County was created in 1891 by the 16th Territorial Assembly and was carved out of Yavapai County, with an initial population of 4,000. An article that appeared in the Arizona Champion on February 14, 1891, painted a picture of hope and optimism in the County's infancy stage.



"We have a county with substantial resources that time will improve. The lumber interests are yet in their infancy, and the cattle and wool interests will increase as time rolls on. We also have the finest building stone in the United States and the quarrying industry will someday be one that Coconino County will be famous for. Our agricultural possibilities have been tested and we are capable of raising almost all necessities of life, more than we can consume with the present population. We are shipping today thousands of pounds of potatoes, both east and west, and they are of the finest quality. Beets, carrots, onions, corn, beans, etc. can also be raised in abundance. All kinds of grains grow and mature in these mountains to perfection, and if we had a grist mill in this section we would manufacture all our own flour. Men who have had experience in wheat raising claim that as good a wheat is grown here as in Dakota or Minnesota. We have everything to make this a prosperous and wealthy county, and we predict that ten years from now Coconino County will have as large representation in the State Legislature as any in Arizona."