

Cornville Historical Society

E-MAIL NEWS

P.O. Box 1200, Cornville, AZ 86325

CENTENNIAL COUNTDOWN EDITION

January 2012

The mission of the Cornville Historical Society is to gather, preserve and share information about the history of rural life within the Cornville postal area from 1860 to the present. This is the seventh in a series of "Centennial Countdown" articles leading to Arizona's 100th Birthday on February 14, 2012.

Note: Over the years, members of the Cornville Historical Society have had the opportunity to sit down and reminisce with several different members of the Girdner family. The family has been generous with us, sharing not only memories and family history but also photos and memorabilia. This is a compilation of some of this information. We wish to thank Randall Stone, David Girdner, Nina Simmons, Bob Girdner, and Marvin Girdner for sharing so much of their family history with us. We also wish to thank William Stone for the information he has posted on www.genealogy.com, Family Tree Maker and the Girdner/Lockhart families for allowing us access to their family reunion site on Facebook. —Janet Cassagio

Girdner Family Tales

By Janet Cassagio

James Pleasant (J.P.) Girdner and Nola Frances Lockhart Girdner, along with their children, Glen, Dale, Stanley, and Eva came to Arizona from Piedmont, Kansas in December 1907 via the railroad to Jerome Junction, near Ashfork, and then the narrow gauge railroad to Jerome. They lived in Jerome for three months and soon purchased 49 acres of land from Captain Andrew Jackson's widow, Margaret Jackson Dumas for \$600. They planted a peach orchard, apple orchard, and other fruit and nut trees. They had farm animals and a garden. Water arrived in gravity-flow ditches extracted from Oak Creek several miles upstream. According to Eva the land had a ditch, fence and lots of mesquite bushes that her dad dug out by hand. The first money crop was watermelons, which were sold in Jerome and Flagstaff.¹

The family lived in a house tent while they cleared land and developed their place. The tent was 30' x 17' and had wooden floors and 3 foot tall wooden sides. The tent was on top of the wooden sides. Eva said, "it was very nice and we had fixed it up just as attractive as any county house. It was considered an elite tent because it had wooden floors and sides. It also had a curtain across the middle to separate the bedroom from the kitchen and living area. This area had a wood stove, which provided warmth and cooking capacity. The tent had a fly over the top, which made an extra canvas (layer) over the tent, leaving a space of 8"

Miss Arizona 1912?

A Google search of "Eva Girdner Stone + Miss Arizona" will return a link to the site http://rockydl.tripod.com/arizona_facts_fun.htm where there is a line on the page "Did You Know?" stating "Eva Girdner Stone – the first Miss Arizona 1912?" Of course the more widely recognized winners of this title didn't show up until 1938 in the case of the Miss America contest and 1952 in the case of the Miss U.S.A. contest but a little more research into this claim uncovers a charming story appropriate for celebrating the Arizona Centennial.

In 1912 there were about 25 families living along lower Oak Creek and Mrs. Girdner got all of them together to celebrate the news that Arizona had become a state. Eva describes this event as follows: "In 1912, in honor of Arizona's statehood, my mother made matching red, white, and blue dresses for me and a friend (Loris Tilson, according to Stanley Girdner, *Arizona Republic*, February 15, 1987). She also made crowns, which stated "Arizona" on mine and "New Mexico" on my friend's crown. My friend's family moved here from Colorado, but they didn't like it here and planned to move to New Mexico. New Mexico became a state in the same year as Arizona. Although Arizona became a state on February 14, we didn't celebrate it until July 4, at which time we wore our dresses and crowns at a neighborhood picnic. I was 7 years old. Later in life, Eva joked that she was the first Miss Arizona!"⁹ The event was so special to her that Eva held on to the dress for a long



time. In 1987 her grandniece, Sandra, wore the dress to celebrate Arizona's Diamond Jubilee at the Pioneer 75th Celebration of Arizona Statehood held in Phoenix. The photo here shows Sandra wearing the dress. Considering her mother made this dress and another one just like it in one morning, it appears Nola was a very talented seamstress!

*Photo: Stanley, Sandra, Eva in 1987
Courtesy Girdner Family Reunion, Facebook*

between the top of the tent and the next layer of canvas.”² This air space made the tent cooler in the summer and protected it from rain in the winter. The tent was raised on logs on end and each one sat in a tomato can full of water so the centipedes, scorpions and other varmints couldn't get into the house. According to Eva, “There were lots of them and some of the centipedes measured 13" long and about 2 1/2" wide. The big ones were sort of gold and green with black legs and they were hideous looking.”³ “Scorpions, lizards, ants, skunks, coyotes and summer heat had to be dealt with while grubbing mesquites and growing fruits and vegetables to survive.”



*Girdners' Original Tent House
Outside view above; Inside view below*



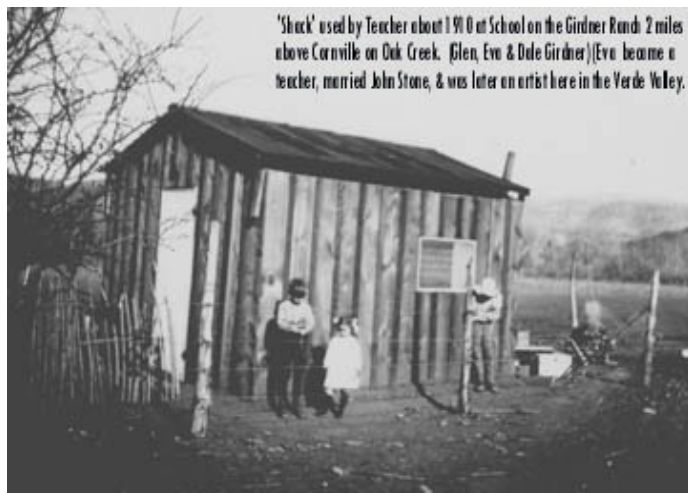
Within three years, an unused schoolhouse from upper Oak Creek was purchased and rebuilt to be the Girdner home for the next 50 years or so.”⁴ The house was a two story with three bedrooms upstairs, a big dining room, living room and kitchen downstairs. The house stood in the same place from when it was built in 1910 until it was torn down in 1983.⁵



The two-story Girdner Home 1910-1983

“The Girdners were frugal, honest, and hard-working. J.P. was the Justice of the Peace from 1910-1914, would deliver Sears and "Monkey Wards" catalogs in a wagon to and from Prescott, going over Mingus through Jerome, and then distributing them to outlying areas. For 20 years, he was the clerk of the Oak Creek School Board (District 16). Nola was a nurse to many, and excellent seamstress, and always involved in school functions, substituting, and being involved in other "acceptable" community events.”⁶ Nola had attended an academy and become a teacher before coming to Arizona.

Soon after they moved to Cornville, the Girdners began renting space to teachers who boarded with the family. One of these teachers, Elsie Hayes wrote in a letter home, “My payment to Mrs. Girdner for the first four weeks after we came into the cabin was only \$11.75 for room rent, dinners, and milk. We save a good deal by doing our own work. We are very busy on Saturday mornings cleaning house, etc. Yesterday I spent a long time ironing and mending, too.”⁷ In other letters she describes the cabin as a 12' x 13' room separate from the house that had a cloth ceiling (calcimine) a light blue) under the regular roof and pretty blue wallpaper on the walls. The family provided the teachers with plenty of free fruits and vegetables and other students would bring them butter and eggs.



The Teacher's Cabin

Teachers were hired for only one or two years at a time because it was assumed they would marry by the end of their contract. Cowboys came to visit from all over the Verde Valley some from as far north as Flagstaff. In several different letters home Elsie Hayes describes Mrs. Girdner as a fine woman and an unusually wise mother who had a keen and intelligent interest in all school matters. She admired Mr. Girdner very much and described him as progressive, earnest and kindly.⁸

As noted above, J.P. and Nola Girdner had three sons, Glen Clark, Dale Howard, and Stanley Ernest, and one daughter, Eva Violet. When the family left Kansas in 1907 Glen's middle name was Hansel. After meeting Senator Clark (for whom Clarkdale was named) on the train to Jerome, J.P. was so impressed with the Senator he changed Glen's middle name to Clark. Glen married Marie Holcomb and had three sons (Alwin, Daniel Edward, and Ronald Glen) and one daughter (Helen). Dale married Betty DeBusk and had three sons (Robert James, David William, and George Wendell). Stanley had two surviving daughters (Nina Laverne and Phyllis) and two sons (Leon and Marvin) with Leona Girdner and one son (Willis) with Viola Girdner. Eva had four sons (John Telford, Gerald Wayne, James Randall, and William Milton) with her husband, John William Stone. All of J.P. and Nola's children maintained close ties to the original ranch for many years.

Over the years, additional homes and buildings were added to the property including the Rock Church that Nola was instrumental in building and that still stands today and a parsonage across the street. The Girdner Ranch was the first ranch on Oak Creek with electricity. In 1929 Stanley engineered and built a direct current (D.C.) 20 amp power generating plant. It was mainly financed by the Girdner family

and wired with telephones to the three homes on the original ranch. Each house had a telephone and electric and one house even had an icemaker. There was a 25-watt bulb rigged up and when one of the houses used more than their allotment of electricity the bulb would dim. The electric required phone coordination amongst the three homes, i. e., turning off heating devices in order to cook. When the family wasn't using the electricity they shared it with the neighbors.



Original JP Girdner Home Ranch (In Sec. 34)

By the late 1930s the property had been subdivided with each of the children (Glen, Dale, Stanley and Eva) having a piece of the land. Glen and Stanley got the largest parcels because they were using the land to make a living. Eva was given seven acres on Swinging Bridge Lane that included the parsonage and the Rock Church. In 1933, Dale had traded his piece to Stanley who was married first and had a better house. Dale wrote down the amount that he would accept and Stanley wrote down the amount he would pay. They were to split the difference, but they both wrote down \$300. Dale ended up with a 20' x 30' one bedroom house near the corner of Swinging Bridge Lane and Old Pumhouse Road, shown as #2 on the map above. In 1937 this house burnt to the ground. Sometime between 1929 and 1939 Dale bought the east half of the Wyncoop Ranch from Paul Arnett. Eva and John Stone purchased the west half. They rented it to Dale and Betty until 1945 when Dale and Betty purchased it from them. Dale named the property the Geronimo Holdout Ranch. In total this was about 70 acres. He eventually sold the ranch to the Merritt family.

Eva's brothers went to Flagstaff to high school but as Eva was the youngest and the only girl, her parents were reluctant to have her leave home. To solve the problem, her mother obtained the first school bus in Arizona and Eva went to Clarkdale High. Eva said smiling, "I drove one week when the driver was sick. It was a 1922 Dodge truck with curtains that the wind really whistled through."¹⁰ "The bus seated 12 people. All of the students who rode the bus were

Dale would gather the cattle and push them up to the foot of Schuerman Mountain, along the side of the highway through Grasshopper Flat, through the community of Sedona, across Oak Creek (where Tlaquepaque now sits), and up Schnebly Hill Road. At that time, Sedona consisted of barely more than Harts General Store, a garage, a church, Post Office, and a grade school with a few scattered homes. Years brought more traffic, homes and businesses, so in some areas, the cattle had to be driven right on the highway. By building new trails, improving others and following existing dirt roads, the Girdners later avoided congested areas by driving their cattle around the base of Wilson Mountain, crossing Wilson Canyon and Oak Creek, and then up Casner Trail.” Regarding those lucky nephews and getting kids to work, Dale would say, “one kid equals a whole kid; two kids equal a half a kid; and three kids equal no kids at all!”

In order to keep the banks of Oak Creek from eroding his land, Dale bought several old, junked cars and submerged them along the banks of the creek. Although today this would not be a viable solution, at the time it did its intended job. The added bonus is that it created what was then considered a fantastic environment for fish. The family referred to this area as “The Parking Lot”.



Family members fishing at the “Parking Lot”
(with two old cars showing in the background)

Stanley was considered a mechanical genius and designed and built many types of farm and ranch equipment, hydroelectric and hydro-ram units for the family and others. He sold many of these in the Verde Valley in the 1940s and 1950s. He built a large hydraulic ram in 1945 using a home built airplane starter engine powered welder. This hydraulic ram was later sold to the Fish Hatchery at Page Springs for \$300. The machine cost nothing to operate and was used by the Hatchery for many years until they replaced it with electric when they couldn’t get any more spare parts. The Girdners built a dam to divert ditch water and the weekenders (people from Cottonwood and Jerome) would come and slide down the dam and mess it up. Stanley’s idea was to put prickly pear where they slid so they would get stickers and therefore quit using it as a slide.

Nina Laverne Girdner Simmons, Stanley’s daughter remembers when they lived with their grandmother that she would recite long poems to them from memory without missing a word. Her grandmother cooked three meals a day and read stories to them after lunch every day. Her father, Stanley would play the guitar and sing or story tell to the kids. Sometimes the adults would play “last couple out” with the kids. Stanley had a great love of geology, maps and the night sky so they had a constant education about these things. He was also a fabulous gardener and recycled everything. On September 24, 1945 Stanley purchased 67 acres in what is today known as Echo Canyon for \$10. His children named the area Lone Wolf Ranch.

Glen carried the mail between Cottonwood and Indian Gardens in 1919 on one pack mule and rode another one. Later he got a small buggy and drove the team of mules.¹³ He had five or six milk cows, worked in the mines in Jerome, was a missionary on the Navajo Indian Reservation, and worked with Navajo children in Cottonwood.

Speaking of Glen, he recounted the following story while being interviewed by Anne Liebert in the early 1980s: “Another school incident involved Joe Lay who was to break one of Mr. Beatty’s rules. When Mr. Beatty disciplined Joe, all the other boys were to jump on the teacher. But, the boys backed out and Joe had to face the teacher alone. Evidently, Mr. Beatty was rather strict and the boys wanted to get the best of him. Glen thought he had a better plan and he went to the treefall where Mr. Beatty crossed the creek on his way to school each morning. Glen wet the log which froze, so that the teacher would slip and fall in the stream. Mr. Beatty managed a safe crossing but Ira Smith did not, arriving at school shaking, shivering and soaking wet. Ira had to sit by the stove all morning to get dry. Glenn admits he never told Ira about fixing the treefall but thinks he might someday when they are older and cooler headed.”¹⁴

While working on her grandmother’s memoirs and visiting with Eva in 1988, Barbara Anne Waite tells of Eva recalling, “My mother always used white linen tablecloths so as to teach us children to be careful in our eating habits. She charged us ten cents if we spilled a drop of blackberry juice as it wouldn’t wash out. School supplies were almost nonexistent. We had a reader, an arithmetic, a speller, a geography and history book, and we almost knew them by heart at the close of the year. We all had slates for school. For groceries or “boughten” things we had to go to Jerome, which took all day in a lumber wagon. We only went a few times a year.”¹⁵

In another interview, Eva said the big excitement in their lives was going to Jerome. "Our parents never told us about it as we got too excited, but I remember being woke up at four o'clock one morning and jumping out of bed. When we got to the foot of the Jerome Hill, my mother put my Sunday dress on me. We had to listen carefully going up the hill for the one automobile in Jerome, as the horse was afraid of it. If the car did come down the hill, we had to hold the horse's head and turn it toward the bank so it couldn't see the car. I thought Jerome smelled heavenly. Mother said it smelled of sulphur, coal and cigar smoke."¹⁶

A term created by the Girdner/Stone family is *converosity*, defined as a conversation sprinkled with humor. Through all of their interviews, no matter which family member is speaking or who is conducting the interview it comes through over and over again that this family excels at converosity!

Then & Now

*Little Rock Church/
School on Swinging
Bridge Road on the
Girdner Ranch
Circa 1932 (right)
and Today (below)*



Girdner Rock Church (Lower Oak Creek, about 1932)



Footnotes

¹ Cottonwood, Clarkdale and Cornville History, Copyright 1984 by Cottonwood Chapter 2021, American Association of Retired Persons, Revised Edition, September 1985, pages 61 - 62.

² Family Tree Maker, www.genealogy.com, William Stone reporting family history according to Eva Girdner Stone.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Family Tree Maker, www.genealogy.com, William Stone reporting family history about James Pleasant Girdner.

⁵ Cottonwood, Clarkdale and Cornville History, Copyright 1984 by Cottonwood Chapter 2021, American Association of Retired Persons, Revised Edition, September 1985, page 62.

⁶ Family Tree Maker, www.genealogy.com, William Stone reporting family history about James Pleasant Girdner.

⁷ Very lovingly yours, Elsie Adventures of an Arizona Schoolteacher 1913 – 1916, Memoirs Compiled by Barbara Anne Waite, Palomar Mountain Bookworks, 2011, page 34.

⁸ Very lovingly yours, Elsie Adventures of an Arizona Schoolteacher 1913 – 1916, Memoirs Compiled by Barbara Anne Waite, Palomar Mountain Bookworks, 2011, pages 20 and 30.

⁹ Family Tree Maker, www.genealogy.com, William Stone reporting family history according to Eva Girdner Stone.

¹⁰ Cottonwood, Clarkdale and Cornville History, Copyright 1984 by Cottonwood Chapter 2021, American Association of Retired Persons, Revised Edition, September 1985, page 63.

¹¹ Family Tree Maker, www.genealogy.com, William Stone reporting family history according to Eva Girdner Stone.

¹² Cottonwood, Clarkdale and Cornville History, Copyright 1984 by Cottonwood Chapter 2021, American Association of Retired Persons, Revised Edition, September 1985, page 63.

¹³ Cottonwood, Clarkdale and Cornville History, Copyright 1984 by Cottonwood Chapter 2021, American Association of Retired Persons, Revised Edition, September 1985, page 63.

¹⁴ Ibid, page 66.

¹⁵ Very lovingly yours, Elsie Adventures of an Arizona Schoolteacher 1913 – 1916, Memoirs Compiled by Barbara Anne Waite, Palomar Mountain Bookworks, 2011, pages 209 – 210.

¹⁶ From Cottonwood, Clarkdale and Cornville History, Copyright 1984 by Cottonwood Chapter 2021, American Association of Retired Persons Revised Edition, September 1985, page 62.