

Cornville Historical Society

E-MAIL NEWS

P.O. Box 1200, Cornville, AZ 86325

CENTENNIAL COUNTDOWN EDITION

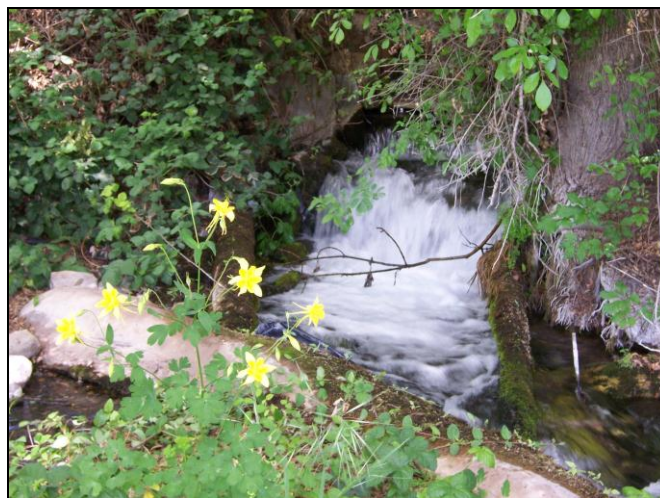
May 2011

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 second in a series of "Centennial Countdown" articles leading to Arizona's 100th Birthday on February 14, 2012.

The Story of Page Springs Road

Between 1874 and 1876, several wagon trains arrived in the Verde Valley from Missouri, bringing pioneers from many parts of the country. Among the pioneers, were the Cople, Mulholland, and Tipton families, who chose to settle on Oak Creek near abundant natural springs. Abraham James farmed on the ranch where the present Page Springs trout rearing ponds are located; Jim Thompson and Ed Conway had the last ranch up the creek above Page Springs. In 1877, Edward Mulholland moved to a place about a half mile below Page Springs. He wrote: *"I was the first man to take out a ditch from Page Spring"*. He added that *"Frank Cople was living at the spring, but farmed the land across the creek and took the water out of Oak Creek. John Tipton was the nearest neighbor below me."* Thus, we have a picture of the early neighborhood and its settlers.

Benjamin Franklin Cople was the first to homestead land that is now part of the Page Springs Fish Hatchery, which he later sold to John T. Cone and Reuben B. Houghton. Cone and Houghton raised corn and beans and rented some of the land to *"Arkansas people"* before selling to James Page, for whom the springs are named. Page was born in Canada and came to the Verde Valley at the age of 24. After purchase of the initial 160 acres on January 26, 1884, Page purchased another 102.7 acres that expanded his ranch in 1894. Page lived on the ranch for 66 years until his death on February 23, 1941, in his 90th year. Sharlot Hall called Page *"the grand old man of Oak Creek."*



Page Springs bubble continuously at 68 degrees.

The settlers cleared the land, dug irrigation ditches and grew crops, which were sold at the Fort Verde military post. In 1933, James Page wrote: *“Right down on Oak Creek I had found all that good water and land that would raise anything from cabbages to roses, from fish to Herefords. And I have done it!”* Sharlot Hall wrote *“The ranch became one of the finest in Yavapai County, with orchard, alfalfa fields, garden and general crops”* ...and *“a snowball tree of giant size...”* A rock building that was part of the pioneer ranch still stands at Page Springs Fish Hatchery. The building was reportedly used as a summer kitchen by the Page family. Sharlot Hall wrote: *“The Page Ranch was a favorite camping place for roundup crews ... where they swam in sparkling ponds, washed their clothes ... and cooking pots. James Page made everyone welcome ... the Verde Valley Pioneers Association held their spring meetings at the beautiful picnic ground and James Page was the President...”*



Historic Page Ranch (kitchen?) structure ... then and now.

In *“The Sequence of Human Occupancy in the Middle Rio Verde Valley, Arizona”*, (May 1937) Agnes Morgan Allen wrote, *“One rather interesting farm activity is found on Page’s Ranch along Oak Creek at the foot of House Mountain. Here, the largest spring in the entire basin gushes from beneath the rock layers ... It maintains a flow of 1,280 miner inches throughout the year. A miner inch is the amount of water which flows through an opening one inch square per minute. This spring water is utilized by a commercial fish hatchery. Fish may be purchased here for restocking private pools and streams or for eating purposes. The demand for trout exceeds the supply at the present time. Restaurants, guest ranches and hotels keep standing orders for trout.”* This story helps explain why one lady later came to the hatchery after it was taken over by the State and tried to buy a trout for a picnic she was planning. She finally realized the men at the hatchery were serious when they refused her \$25 check for the trout.

Access to Page Springs originally was on rough wagon roads from Cottonwood by way of the old Cornville Road. The actual Page Springs Road was apparently built by federal work crews in about 1931. Mrs. Frances Morgan, now of Cottonwood, tells of an incident that took place in July 1931. She was eleven years old and visiting her grandfather, Andrew Pally, who owned a fruit farm and sold produce at a stand beside Page Springs Road. Work crews were in the process of working on the road that summer, using picks and shovels and no heavy equipment, because more people could be employed that way. Workers came to warn the family that they would be doing some blasting nearby, so the family took cover away from the site. Afterwards, a worker came to the door and asked her grandmother, *“How many chickens did we get?”* Mrs. Pally checked and counted seven chickens that had died from the blast. The worker then paid her for the birds in cash right on the spot!

A 1932 USGS quadrangle map shows Page Springs Road following generally the same route as it does today. James Page lived on one side of the creek; and his son Edgar lived on the other side. Page donated land to Yavapai County for the portion of road that crossed his property. Marie Wroot, the granddaughter of James Page, remembered that the road was built while she was a child, greatly improving the original wagon road. Back then, there was a low water crossing where residents could ford the creek at

what now is the RV park by Page Springs Restaurant. The Page Springs Bridge was built in 1935-36, just before a major flood in February 1937. "Water lapped over the top and debris caught on the span, but luckily the bridge did not wash out", she said. She told of her father and Joe Gifford roping logs to the side. The road was first surfaced in the late 1940's or early 1950's



A lone angler in Oak Creek as seen from Page Springs Bridge.

The road was regarded as a County road as early as 1937; and it has been maintained by Yavapai County for many years. Two resolutions, adopted by the Yavapai County Board of Supervisors in 1950 and 1951, officially acknowledge Yavapai County jurisdiction of Page Springs Road as a public road: (1) "Resolution of Condemnation for County Highway Purposes", adopted March 6, 1950 (from the junction of Cornville Road, 4.8 miles north to Page Springs Bridge); and (2) "Resolution of Establishment for County Highway Purposes", adopted August 20, 1951 (from Page Springs Bridge, 2.2 miles north to Highway 89A).

Both as a local route and a main road, Page Springs Road has been important to the historic and cultural development of the region. The road served an urgent state need for a time, when it became part of the main route from Phoenix to Flagstaff. Area residents remember when Page Springs Road was used by travelers between Flagstaff and Phoenix while sections of I-17 north of the McGuireville exit were under construction in the 1950's.



Farm produce signs still dot Page Springs Road.

Page Springs Road was an important mail route and a trade route that connected the farmers along Oak Creek with the troops at Fort Verde and the miners in Jerome—the primary markets for farm products. In the 1930's, federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) crews improved the road and the Rural Electric Authority (REA) followed the route with the first electric lines to the area. Farm produce stands dotted the road. Since the mid 1950's, the historic Page Springs Store (now a restaurant) and Casey's Corner Gas Station and Store served residents on the north and south ends of the road.

For the most part, Page Springs Road is a narrow, winding, two-lane, scenic route. The road's proximity to Oak Creek, unique natural artesian springs, archeological sites, original homesteads, historic farm settlements, stage roads, and pioneer schools indicate that the road was integral to the overall history of the area. Page Springs is situated in the heart of the Verde Valley, almost equidistant from the pre-historic Tuzigoot and Montezuma National Monuments, historic Jerome, the old Clarkdale "company town" and Fort Verde Army Post. As such, the route lies within a few miles of sites of significance to Arizona's history.

Page Springs Hatchery has been in operation since 1932. Before that, it was owned by the Arizona Trout Company, owned by James Page and partner(s). They installed cement ponds and a huge picnic ground north of the ponds, where pioneer picnics were held. People came from all over for roasting ears. In 1938, the Arizona Game and Fish Department secured a lease agreement and in 1949 purchased the property. Earthen ponds were used and springs supplied the necessary water at the site by means of open ditches and buried pipes. In the late 1950s fish were cultured in large ponds 12-14 feet deep.

The hatchery now consists of 195 acres in two parcels along Oak Creek and is owned and administered by the Arizona Game and Fish Department. Water for the hatchery comes from several springs located near the visitor parking lot. The natural artesian springs are unmatched anywhere else in the State, flowing at 68 degrees for hundreds of years. The springs produce a constant flow (15 million gallons a day) of 68-degree water year around, ideal for trout growth.

Families of original settlers still call the area home; and the area retains a very strong "rural sense of place". Former Cornville resident Christine Adams, in a DVD titled *"Expressions of the Land—Highways to Heaven"*, portrays Page Springs Road as a unique and appealing *"Sunday kind of place"* for *"a drive to nowhere...and somewhere...in the heart"*. Adams laments the facts that growth and the fast pace of today's society have led to massive highway developments and that the days of family dinners and Sunday drives are gone. Now, Page Springs Road, offers an opportunity to relive those lost times.



"A drive to nowhere ... and somewhere... in the heart." .