

PHOENIX HISTORY

Answers about history of the old Isaac house

VIVIA STRANG

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The year I was born we lived in a tiny silver trailer.

Around 1951 my dad decided to build a house and chose a lot west of Phoenix, north of McDowell between 31st and 32nd Avenues on Coronado Road. In years past it had been the site of the corrals for the Isaac Ranch, and dad thought the soil would be well fertilized after years of livestock use. It wasn't.

On the adjacent south lot was the old wooden barn, leaning a little bit but still standing and inhabited by a huge owl that silently came and went through the open loft window in the evenings.

To the southwest on Almeria Road the old Isaac house stood empty with its doors and windows boarded shut. Who lived there? What did they do? Why is the house empty? Where did they go?

It would be many years before I had any answers. Once it had been the busy, prosperous household of prominent Phoenix pioneers, William and Jennie Isaac.

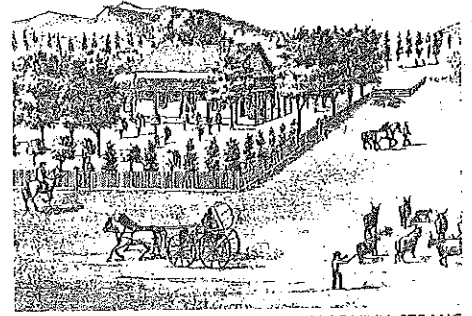
William and Jennie were born in Tennessee and married in Platt County, Mo., July 11, 1848. They would eventually have 11 children, eight living to adulthood.

Around 1858 they moved to California and in the spring of 1875 the William Isaac family left Salinas, Calif., bound for the Arizona Territory. They traveled for almost two months in two wagons pulled by four horses each.

On July 1, 1875, they crossed the Colorado River into Arizona. Arriving in Prescott about a week later, they stayed there for the summer.

In the fall, William Isaac and his grown sons rode south to the Salt River Valley and staked out a homestead west of Phoenix.

In 1876, the Isaacs moved to Phoenix and resided in an adobe structure at the



COURTESY OF VIVIA STRANG

A sketch of Isaac Ranch in its early days.

corner of Seventh Avenue and Jackson Street while the men constructed a house on the new homestead.

Isaac raised chiefly grain and alfalfa on his 400 acres. The grain yielded 1,800 pounds per acre, and the alfalfa six tons per acre.

There was a large orchard of 200 trees, peach, apricot and apple. He also raised stock, having 60 cattle, 30 horses, and five mules.

Mr. Isaac served as road overseer of District No. 1 in 1878 and as county surveyor from 1881 to 1882. He assisted Captain Hancock in surveying the Grand Canal.

To ensure an education for his younger children, William Isaac donated the land and founded Isaac School. The school is still in its original location at 35th Avenue and McDowell. It is now over 135 years old and still educating children.

Some of those laterals off the Grand Canal irrigated Isaac's grain and alfalfa fields and would later provide swimming and water recreation for baby boomers who attended Isaac School and were living in vernacular houses built on his fields. I was lucky to be one of them.

Vivia Strang is a National Register Coordinator for the State Historic Preservation Office.

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