

Founding of Coolidge, Arizona

Coolidge, Arizona is located in the center of the Casa Grande Valley, midway between Phoenix and Tucson on Highway No. 87, the shortest all paved highway connecting the two cities, and on the Southern Pacific Mail Line Railroad.

The Southern Pacific Company built their new main line railroad thru that was destined to be the town of Coolidge in 1924. The building of this railroad and the assurance from congress by the Congressional Act of June 7, 1924, authorizing the construction of a storage dam, known as the Coolidge Dam, across the Gila River at San Carlos, which would place 100,000 acres of land in the valley 110 miles below to the west under irrigation, were the two main reasons that prompted my husband, Mr. R.J. Jones, in May and June, 1925, to plat out eighty acres of land into a townsite, the Original Townsite of Coolidge, which he founded and named "Coolidge" in honor of the President whose signature made possible the numerous natural conditions that were very vital that entered in, such as fertile soil, climate, localization, etc., that gave an ideal agricultural background. We realized with these conditions that this spot so certainly located in the valley coming into its own naturally must have a town commensurate with its development, hence the founding of Coolidge in May, 1925.

It was on a Sunday in the early part of 1925, while my husband and I were sitting with Mr. and Mrs. Clement O. Seagoe in their home on their ranch just south from the Townsite we were contemplating surveying, when the discussion of the name of the town came up. After several names had been mentioned, Jonesville and Jonesburg, etc., my husband suggested the name "Coolidge" in commemoration of the President whose signature made possible the Coolidge Dam. This name being agreeable to all, the new prospective town was so named.

The Coolidge Dam was dedicated by Hon. Calvin Coolidge, ex-president, March 4, 1930. The whole state of Arizona joined in on this celebration. Mr. R.J. Jones from our vicinity was appointed by the Governor to be on the reception committee. The bountiful feast and inspiring ceremonies were held on the highway crossing over the Coolidge Dam.

At the completion of the new main railroad of the Southern Pacific thru Phoenix and on by the way of Yuma to Los Angeles in 1925, a big Main Line Railroad celebration was held in Phoenix, October 15, 1926. A parade, dance and all that goes with a celebration of that kind were held. Coolidge entered the celebration by placing four floats in the parade and joining in on the street carnival that evening. Coolidge had a queen, Elsie Wofford, who sat on a high seat above the top of one of the floats while on a seat lower down on each side of the "Coolidge Queen" sat two other Coolidge Belles. It put Coolidge on the map. Everyone began to inquire about this new town of Coolidge. Mr. Jones followed this up with a lot of Coolidge advertising thru the Phoenix papers.

There were no paved highways at that time passing thru or even near Coolidge. There was, however, a dirt highway leading from Casa Grande to Florence that passed thru Coolidge. The ruts were quite deep and the dust so thick at times that to travel over it in an automobile was like riding a bucking bronco, bareback, over a freshly picked field. There were two ways we had at that time of reaching the proposed

townsite from Phoenix, one by the way of the Sacaton Indian Reservation and the other by the way of Florence. We chose the Sacaton route when the Gila River was passable as it was twenty miles nearer. At that time there was no bridge across the Gila River near Sacaton as we find today, so we had to cross over on the Gila River bed. Of course, that was prohibitive during a rain or just after a rain, as the river usually had quite a lot of water at that time. At other times it was like Arizona's dry rivers, dry on the surface with perhaps an undercurrent of water beneath the sand. After leaving Sacaton we had to travel over eighteen miles of winding road thru flora covered desert. There were several of these trails, we never knew which was which, but we did know that no matter how winding or in what direction we were going at times we would finally wind up at the Casa Grande Monument, which is only one mile from Coolidge.

We had several obstacles to overcome in the development of Coolidge and at times things looked very blue, but as a whole each step in our growth has been natural and in pace with progress that it reminds one of climbing a ladder—using caution with each step we find ourselves going ahead. There was no boom or undue excitement—just natural conditions, such as fertile soil, location, climate and water which assured productivity, together with the ingenuity of persuading the state of the necessity of running the state highway through our town, the granting to us of a depot by the Southern Pacific Company, the coming in of churches, schools, civic improvements and founding of Coolidge. These assurances, one by one as time went along, always brought new people and new businesses which have given our town a firm foundation upon which to keep forging ahead.

The years 1929-30 were epochal years as they were marked by distinctive developments, such as the dedication of the Coolidge Dam, opening of Hwy. 87, printing of the first newspaper, opening of a bank, the forming of many organizations, the clearing for productivity of many acres of virgin soil, etc.

The founding of the town arouses and gives vent to that pioneering spirit—it gives one unlimited expression in various ways of development. It is a most interesting and a most inspiring sight to witness the transformation of a desert into a garden spot and at the same time have the pleasure of going along hand in hand planning and building and watching spring up out of its very midst and growing into a thriving little city containing all modern conveniences within the short period of 10 years.

The Original Townsite of Coolidge was followed by the Seagoe, Bagn, North Coolidge, Jones, Jackson, Stoeger and Allen Additions. There are at present 320 acres platted out into city lots.