

LIGHTHOUSE ON THE DESERT

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There was a time in Arizona's vanished days when the only means of communication between towns and mining camps and farming communities throughout the Territory was furnished by lonely and dangerous roads and trails, across deserts and over mountains, along which wild and desperate Apaches were ever watching for unwary travelers or unprotected wagon trains. A number of these old routes of travel — more frequently used than others — became notable in Arizona's historical annals.

On one of the lonely and barren stretches of desert highway, that which crossed the vast expanse of waterless country between Wickenburg, on the Hassayampa, and Ehrenberg, on the Colorado, there stood, years ago, a primitive but nevertheless effective "lighthouse." This was operated for the purpose of saving lives, just as are the towering structures of modern days that can be found along the rocky and dangerous shores of the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. Arizona's lighthouse, however, was known as "The Lighthouse on the Desert" and was

located alongside Culling's Well, a famous stage station of early days.

This 200-foot-deep well furnished a fine and unfailing supply of water and had been sunk into the desert sand at the only point where water could be secured. The water was cool and drawn up from the darksome depths of the well in a great bucket made from a wooden barrel. The revolving drum above the mouth of the well was operated by a blindfolded mule that knew to an inch just how many rounds were required to be made before the dripping, clanking bucket would reach the top and automatically empty itself into a trough. At other tanks and troughs — a fair distance from the station — always stood cattle and other domestic animals that came there to drink of the life-giving water.

Culling's Well was also a stage station where food and shelter could be obtained by the weary traveler who chanced to pass that way. It stood in the broad McMullen Valley, between the Harcuvars on the north and the Harquahalas on the south, and on the

edge of Centennial Wash. The station had been established by Charles C. Culling, a native of England, in 1868. At Culling's Well a road branched to the northeast leading to the Prescott country while the main traveled highway continued westerly to the Colorado River and easterly to Wickenburg and the mining camps of that vicinity. It became, in time, an important stopping place for stage and wagon travel across that portion of the Territory. Mr. Culling, the original builder and operator of the well and station, died at the place in 1879 and was buried there, a large wooden cross marking today the location of his grave.

In Martha Summerhayes' *Vanished Arizona*, there appears the following statement describing a journey from Prescott to Ehrenberg on the Colorado:

"The second day from Prescott brought us to Culling's Well. Mrs. Culling cooked us an excellent dinner. She had a little boy named Daniel. She put my baby to bed in Daniel's crib. I was so grateful."

The child mentioned by Mrs. Summerhayes — Daniel L. Culling — is today a well-known resident of Phoenix. Recently Mr. Culling, recalling the past, said:

"My father arrived in Arizona City (now Yuma) in 1864, and boarding a river steamer piloted by Captain Isaac Polhamus, landed at the great placer camp of La Paz, where he stayed a short while. He then went to Wickenburg and, in the latter part of 1864, was employed as a miner at

the Vulture. He then prospected the Weaver country in company with William H. (Bill) Kirkland, notable Arizona pioneer. Returning to Wickenburg, he decided to build a station on the Wickenburg-Ehrenberg road. Five miles to the east of Culling's Well he started his first well. He sunk this well to a great depth without striking water. He then moved to the Culling's Well site where, at 240 feet, he struck a flow of good water but continued down another 25 feet to ensure a plentiful supply.

"Here he built his station. Two stages passed the station daily, one to the east and the other to the west. They were six-horse affairs. To water a single head of stock cost 25 cents and a barrel of water was worth 50 cents. My father also had cattle around the station and I remember that sometime in the early 1870s the place was raided by Apaches, who ran off a large herd of Father's cattle, burned several stacks of hay and caused other damage. My father presented to the government a claim for damages but for some reason it was never paid.

"The most interesting person who I now recall as stopping at the station was Hi Jolly, the camel driver. He used to stop at Father's place to water his camels, rough ungainly beasts that were hard to handle. They would only obey Hi Jolly, their master. On one of his visits he presented me with a young camel which I kept for quite a while but, after it had become quite large, it caused so



much disturbance among the stock at the station that I took it over one of the divides to the south where I knew a herd of camels was roaming about, and turned it loose.

"I was born at Ehrenberg in 1873 but, of course, I grew up around Culling's Well."

After the death of Charles Culling, his widow married Joe Drew, who had previously been a merchant at the Vulture Mine, and he then took charge of affairs at Culling's Well.

Some forty miles to the eastward of Culling's Well — where the Hassayampa River flows southward from the mountain regions of central Arizona past the mining town of Wickenburg — was the nearest water in that direction, while it was at least 30 miles to any water to the north, or south, or west of Culling's Well.

Along this road — beside which stood this important well and stage station —

Weak and exhausted, he had lain down to die when he saw rays of lamplight.

passed, years ago, much of Arizona's travel. It was, in those days, a widely used and historic highway and many notable incidents occurred here and there along its sandy, winding course. The most outstanding of these is known in Arizona's annals as "The Wickenburg Massacre" — which occurred in the early morning of November 5, 1871.

In the heat of summer, however, it was a terrible route to travel and much of its way was blazed by the rude graves of those who had died of thirst while following its dreary, desolate length from the Hassayampa to the Colorado.

Yet, after all, the desert along the old Wickenburg-Ehrenberg road was not entirely without attraction. Save in the vicinity of Culling's Well, there were not cattle or other stock to eat the grasses that came to life with the first refreshing rains of springtime and beautiful savannas stretched away for miles in every direction.

But, in that region, the summer is unrelenting in the intensity of its heat. The journey from Wickenburg, on the Hassayampa, to Culling's Well, could only be

made in that season of the year with a plentiful supply of water — gallons, if possible, to each individual. A goodly number of unfortunate foot travelers had discovered this at the cost of their lives and it is known that many of these — a dozen or more — died when only a few miles from the place where water could have been had in abundance.

In 1898, two miners expired by the roadside within sight of their goal and, in the early part of 1900, in the month of February, a prospector's body was found within rifle-shot of the little

desert station. Shortly after the latter incident, a young German lad — just after nightfall — came staggering to the watering tank near the station. Weak and exhausted from thirst, he had lain down to die when happening to open his eyes he saw rays of lamplight streaming through a window. Hope revived, and overcoming the desire to give up, he gained his feet and staggered toward the light which, fortunately, he had strength enough to reach and thus saved his life.

It was after this German lad's experience that Joe Drew, the keeper of the station, determined, out of mercy and a goodness of heart, to establish his lighthouse. He fashioned a tall pole from two saguaro ribs fastened together and nailed it to a stout board on the roof of the station house. Every night from the top of this pole, there swung a lantern the bright beams of which could be seen for miles across the level plain and which proved, time after time, a light of promise and a beacon of hope and salvation to many a weary and discouraged traveler. This custom was kept up for many years — in fact as long as kindly Joe Drew lived at the old station, which was abandoned when the Parker cut-off was constructed in 1905-06. [With the coming of the railroads extensive stage travel ceased in Arizona.] Mr. Drew later removed to Phoenix where he was widely known as a good and industrious citizen.

Thus it was, that Arizona's famous Lighthouse on the Desert was established in that olden day — an Arizonan's way of showing unalloyed and spontaneous sympathy for his fellowmen.

"Acceptable to the Lord is the man who showeth mercy." ■

