

“[There was] a big red rock a-lookin’ like a giant was pourin’ you a cup of coffee.”
(U. S. Army trooper Nels Larsen, c. 1876)

Background and Settlement

People have been building homes in West Sedona for a very long time. Archaeological evidence indicates that people first lived in the landscapes of today’s Sedona and Verde Valley at least 12,000 years ago. Whether these groups of the “Central Arizona Tradition” (sometimes called “Southern Sinagua”) were ancestral to the Yavapai hunter-gatherer-farmers who began moving into the region between 1250 and 1400 is still unclear. At their population height, though, the Yavapai peoples may have covered an ancestral territory of as much as ten million acres. Between 1300 and 1500 some new people moved in: semi-nomadic Western (Tonto) Apache groups migrating from the north or from the Plains. By the time that American settlers discovered the Oak Creek-Sedona area in the nineteenth century, Yavapai and Apache peoples had been occupying the land for at least four hundred years.

The Spanish explorers who first encountered this region in 1583 were looking for gold (and Christian converts) but were disappointed to find only the copper of today’s Jerome. They didn’t stay long, and didn’t come back. Two hundred years passed. Although a few White miners and trappers – “Mountain men” – visited the region as early as the 1820s, three events of mid-century brought serious attention to the area: the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the war with Mexico in 1848 and ceded Arizona Territory to the United States; the discovery of gold in California; and, again in the 1860s, gold in Prescott. The growing desire for these resources of Indian lands led to the establishment of a military fort at Camp Verde in the sixties; beginning in the early 1870s, the U. S. Army pursued relentless and bloody warfare for more than a decade against the Native peoples throughout what was called “Apachería” (or Apache country), including the Red Rock region. The military campaign resulted in removal of almost all Yavapais and Apaches, temporarily to the Rio Verde Reservation (1871-75) north of Camp Verde, and then to the San Carlos Reservation in eastern Arizona. Although some began to drift back in the 1880s, and the federal government established small reservations (in Prescott, Camp Verde and Clarkdale) during the next forty years, for Native peoples the indigenous territory was gone.

Even in the midst of this process, in the 1870s pioneering individuals and families began moving into the Oak Creek and Verde River valleys to settle homesteads, farm, raise horses and cattle and establish orchards and gardens. In the same period soldiers from Camp Verde, too, came up to cooler country to fish for trout and relax (thus “Soldier’s Pass,” “Soldier’s Wash”); informally they named the idyllic Oak Creek area “Camp Garden.” When Jim (John James) Thompson, the first White settler in Oak Creek Canyon, moved into the area known as Indian Gardens in 1876, it is said, the Native peoples were gone but their traditional crops of squash, corn and beans were still growing.

To the immediate west of “Camp Gardens” (as Sedona was called for a time), the flatlands stretching between Coffee Pot Rock to the north and Table Top Mountain (now Airport Mesa) to the south, was originally named Grasshopper Flat(s) by camping soldiers. When early explorer B. F. (Frank) Copple settled in for a time in the 1870s with a few cattle and horses, the name changed to Copple Flat; but after he moved further down Oak Creek (to today’s Page Springs fish hatchery area), soldiers and other trout fishermen changed the name back to Grasshopper. They were fond of coming to the flatland, it seems, to catch the insects for bait (“in tobacco cans,” according the latter-day recollections of Jim Thompson’s son, Albert). This is how one of General Crook’s soldiers, a Swedish immigrant named Nels Larsen, remembered the Flats:

You know what stays with me about that place was the grasshoppers. Only saw that many once and that was the great grasshopper famine when they swept the Big Plains clean. These flew onto the troops, into their mouths. Every man tied his kerchief around his mouth and nose, some even took their extra and tied over his horse’s nostrils. Funny thing, though, the gardens weren’t eaten flat. Course, [if] we’d had time we could have roasted some like the Apache did. They do make mighty good eatin’. Well, after that the fellows called that flat Grasshopper, even named the cannon the Grasshopper. They kind of liked to have it along with ‘em.

Beginning in 1922, Henry Elmer Cook homesteaded a 160-acre parcel that extended northward from below today’s Airport Mesa, while his son Jay worked another parcel stretching southward from Coffee Pot Rock. The two parcels were divided by the road from Sedona to Cottonwood (now State Route 89A); when Henry and his wife Effie moved away in 1943, Jay built a motel and store for tourists on their original homestead. His own parcel to the north would become the Sedona West Subdivision in 1960 – but only after first hosting a Hollywood movie set.

The Movies Come – and the Hallermunds, too

The first western movie in Red Rock Country was a silent film adaptation of Zane Grey’s popular 1921 novel, *The Call of the Canyon*, shot in 1923 in West Fork, toward the north end of Oak Creek Canyon. Having discovered the scenic beauty of the region, over the next two decades, as both sound and color were added to movie productions, Hollywood studios and directors produced a series of about two dozen westerns with such actors as George O’Brien and Maureen O’Sullivan. (For lists and discussions of films and stars, see Joe McNeill’s 2010 history, *Arizona’s Little Hollywood: Sedona and Northern Arizona’s Forgotten Film History 1923-1973*.)

In 1946 Republic Pictures Corporation and its major star, John Wayne, decided to film their next western film, *The Angel and the Badman*, at various sites in the Sedona area. It was Wayne’s first film as producer as well as star, and for the filming Republic decided to build Sedona Lodge (on today’s Route 179, near Hillside and Arabella Hotel Sedona) to house both crew and actors,

as well as a complete sound stage (designed by Howard Madole). According to McNeill, it was “the only permanent complex ever built in the United States specifically to service movie companies on location” (286). Furthermore, Republic also leased some acreage on the former Jay Cook homestead land on the north side of 89A, now (1946) owned by Otto and Sally Hallermund.

Who were the Hallermunds? A brief digression:

Otto Platen zu Hallermund (1895-1970) belonged to a Danish noble family, served with the Danish army in the First World War, and emigrated from Denmark to the United States in 1919, working as a rancher and cowboy in the Dakotas, Montana, California, and finally Arizona by 1925. (He forfeited his Danish rights and position by becoming an American citizen.) Over the next years he managed a number of Arizona ranches, including Long Meadow in Prescott, Cane Springs in Kingman, and Fern Mountain north of Flagstaff. Here he became acquainted with Richard Riordan and his wife Elsie Lindblom Riordan. Elsie had come to Arizona Teachers College (now Northern Arizona University), met and married the young Riordan, and settled in Flagstaff. But Elsie also had four more sisters, and in 1936 she invited two of them, Sally and Lydia, to come join her – with the expectation (openly shared by Otto) that one would marry handsome cowboy Otto. The scheme worked. Sally (1898-1980), born in Minnesota but raised in San Jose, California, was a graduate of Berkeley in bacteriology with a career as an x-ray technician. But ranching (and Otto) appealed to her and they were soon married. Although the marriage eventually dissolved, Sally established her home on Red Rock Loop Road and raised cattle from Dry Creek and up Schnebly Hill to summer pastures in Mountainaire for the next forty years. Otto remarried and moved to Prescott, where he died in 1970.

Among the Hallermund properties in 1946 was the former Cook homestead. They leased some acreage under picturesque Coffee Pot Rock to Republic Pictures, and in the spring of that year the film set of a western town began to emerge: saloon, corral, telegraph office, cemetery, and even a small stretch of railroad with locomotive. (A model and pictures of the set can be seen today at the Sedona Heritage Museum, inside the original, refurbished telegraph office – the only remaining original structure from the set.) This western street under Coffee Pot Rock was used by many studios and film stars – along with sites on Schnebly Hill, Oak Creek, Bell Rock and elsewhere – for dozens more westerns over the next decade; these included, among others, *Station West*, *The Fabulous Texan*, *Copper Canyon*, *Broken Arrow*, *Shotgun*, *The Last Wagon*, *Johnny Guitar*, and *3:10 to Yuma*. All but the last are current street names in the Sedona West subdivision. The film set was located approximately at the corner of today’s Flaming Arrow and Last Wagon.

The western cowboy and ranching theme that predominated in Sedona during the post-WWII decades was strongly reinforced by the development, in the 1950s, of the “Posse Grounds” area immediately to the east of today’s subdivision. The Coconino County Sheriff’s Posse, together with the Oak Creek Lion’s Club, initially leased the land from the U. S. Forest Service in

the early fifties as a community recreation ground for rodeos, square dancing, Chuck Wagon dinners, Boy Scout camping, baseball, a shooting range, and many other activities sponsored by numerous local community organizations. For many years the Posse put on rodeos in May and roundups in August, inviting posses and others from around the state. (In 1953 the local Lions Club sponsored its first "Posse Parade," with 200-300 horses, on the western movie set; 4000 people attended, along with TV trucks and news photographers.) In 1969 the deed to Posse Grounds passed from the Forest Service to the state of Arizona and the area became a locally administered community park of Yavapai County; in 1990 the newly incorporated city of Sedona purchased the Posse Grounds land.

By the time of *The Last Wagon* and *3:10 to Yuma*, which were filmed in 1955 and 1956, Hollywood's western town under Coffee Pot Rock had lost several of its buildings, Sedona's suburbs had begun to spread to the area, and the transition from movie lot to subdivision was on the horizon. Just to the west of today's Mountain Shadows road, lot prices for a new Coffee Pot subdivision were below \$800; according to McNeill, "a few members of *The Last Wagon* cast made an appearance at the May 26, 1956, opening-day bash, which used the lure of music and free barbecue to entice potential buyers" (549). Four years later a road named Last Wagon Drive would become the eastern boundary of the first phase of the new Sedona West subdivision.

The Subdivision of Sedona West (I and II)

Jim and Edith Geary moved to Sedona in 1959 from Texas, where she had grown up and he had studied law. They began Sedona's first cable TV company and settled in to own and operate Real Estate Central on 89A (at the location of today's Mariposa Restaurant), where Edith was the main broker. After water was found under Grasshopper Flats in the forties, a real estate boom began in Sedona; in 1953 Carl Williams drilled the first well in the Flats. In addition to Sedona West, five subdivisions appeared in Sedona in rapid succession through the sixties: Broken Arrow (1954), Chapel Bells Estates (1962), Thunderbird Hills I (1965), Broken Arrow Heights (1967), and Rolling Hills (1969). But Sedona West was to be the most ambitious, and it was mainly the Gearys who platted and developed the original subdivision in 1960. (They also developed Rolling Hills.)

In 1960 the Gearys and Wayne Burns of Houston, Texas, bought 80 acres for Sedona West I, and an additional 40 for what would become Sedona West II, from Sally Hallermund (information courtesy Steve Geary). They joined with Jack Clevenger of Clevenger Realty in Phoenix to develop a vigorous advertising campaign. Jim soon hired a crew to bulldoze the western film set (all except the telegraph office, which had been moved after *Angel and the Badman* to Sally's ranch on Red Rock Loop Road). In fact, according to son Steve, Jim had to bulldoze the "cemetery" himself, since the 'dozer driver thought there were real bodies in there. Jim just climbed up, took the controls himself, and plowed through the fence . . .

The original platting of Sedona West I (lots 1-231) was bounded by Mountain Shadows, Stations West and Pony Soldier Circle on the west side, and Last Wagon Drive on the east. Sedona West II (lots 232-345), from Mogollon on the west to Zane Grey on the east, was laid out and recorded by 1962 as well. The entire subdivision was fenced to prevent incursion from cattle (and people) from the surrounding Coconino National Forest, and for three decades the only entrance/exit was via Mountain Shadows; the Coffee Pot Drive connection was added in 1995 as part of a plan to be able to drive through the western subdivisions along Sanborn/Thunder Mountain without recourse to 89A.

The Gearys' marketing brochure described Sedona West as "Arizona's Finest Subdivision in the West's Most Colorful Country," and they promised custom-made homes with covenants and restrictions to protect the appearance of the neighborhood and the value of the properties. For their own home – one of the first houses in Sedona West (280 Zane Grey Drive) – the Gearys hired architect Donald Theodore Van Ess (1919-1993), who created a striking contemporary, midcentury design. In 2010 their Van Ess House was designated a City of Sedona Historic Landmark. Additionally, several other homes in the subdivision were designed by architect Howard Marion Madole (1923-2015). Madole moved to Sedona in 1948 after studying Frank Lloyd Wright's "Usonian" principles of domestic architecture (L-shaped structure, native materials, flat roofs with cantilevered overhangs, clerestory windows and natural lighting, and clean, uninterrupted lines). Today Madole is celebrated as "Sedona's First Architect," a master of midcentury modernism.

Sedona West Opens: The Early Years, the CCRs (Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions), and the SWPOA

By the end of January, 1961, the Gearys and Clevenger Realty had sold 9% of the lots in Sedona West I, and the subdivision officially opened in April. As promised by the developers, the Arizona Title Insurance and Trust Company and the Union Title company promulgated the original Declaration of Restrictions for the entire projected subdivision (lots 1-345), which were recorded with the Yavapai Recorder's Office (Book 246, pp. 279-282). The original restrictions and covenants reflected the major concerns of the time: single family dwellings only; no subdividing of lots; absolutely no businesses; no animals other than household pets; rentals to single families only; prompt completion of construction; no trailers, unless completely screened from view; burial or screening of fuel or other tanks. The restrictions were to run for ten years, with an automatic extension of an additional ten years "unless an instrument signed by a majority of the then owners of the lots has been recorded, agreeing to change the same in whole or in part." (In December, 1970, a group of owners in Sedona West II did propose a document of CCR amendments for their part of the subdivision, but it was never approved or recorded; since that time the CCRs, amended and "restated" in 1977, 1995, and 2007 have always applied to all properties in the entire subdivision.)

In 1970 an early effort was made to form a “Sedona West Home Owners Association,” but this initiative failed. The following year, in early August, a group of Sedona West property owners met at the Elks Club and voted to create the Sedona West Property Owners Association. Interestingly, the spurring issue was the quality of the roads in the subdivision: the meeting “stemmed from the generosity of resident owners in donating a fund for the purpose of repairing and resurfacing the roads in Sedona West to bring them up to Yavapai County ‘specs,’ at which point the county would take them over for repair, maintenance, improvement, snow removal, weed control and center striping.” (SWPOA Treasurer’s Report 3 December 1971). At the end of August, 1971, the new Board of Directors approved the Articles of Incorporation and the original By-laws of the new organization. The initial incorporation was for 25 years and was recorded with Yavapai County on 6 January 1972.

The early SWPOA Board faced certain recurrent issues in its first decade, namely constant penetration (sometimes animal, usually human) of the fence surrounding the subdivision and separating it from the surrounding National Forest, and the vexing issue of the screening of trailers, motor homes, motor bikes, and boat trailers. In 1977 the Board was able to report that 54% of the current 288 property owners had approved a tightened restatement of the CCRs (11% voted no; 35% never responded). The restated restrictions were duly recorded with Yavapai County. They were to extend to 1987, with an automatic extension to 1997, pending no majority objection. Still, the problems with trailers persisted, as the Board debated whether and how to enforce the CCRs, how to pay for legal fees and whether to test the restrictions in court. Ultimately, after meeting and negotiating with a dozen property owners, in 1980 the SWPOA Board decided to pursue two court cases against recalcitrant owners. They set a goal of \$5000 for a legal fund and asked for donations from property owners; only 17% responded positively. Still, the Board went ahead and won the first case in 1980; and the second the following year. The latter case was more serious, since the defendant charged that the subdivision covenants were a usurpation of his constitutional rights as a property owner. In *Bley v Myers* the superior court of Yavapai County found in support of the validity and enforceability of the subdivision’s restrictions. There have been no further court cases since 1981.

The 1980s and 1990s

In 1987 the City of Sedona was incorporated; as a consequence the most important government relationship of the subdivision changed from Yavapai County to the new city. In that year also, Sedona West’s CCRs were automatically extended for ten years. Still, the perennial issue of informing real estate brokers, title companies and new owners about the restrictions continued to concern the SWPOA Board. As early as 1989 the Architectural Control Committee (now partially melded into the Board) began rewriting and reorganizing sections of the restrictions for greater clarity, a process that continued for five years. In April, 1994, the Board sent the restated restrictions to the property owners for vote, and at the annual meeting in November, 1994, they were approved by more than 51% of recorded owners. The new

restrictions went into effect on January 1, 1995, and were recorded with Yavapai County two weeks later. In 2007 the most recent set of amendments to the CCRs was approved by a majority of property owners. **The covenants, conditions and restrictions (CC&Rs) as approved in 1995 and 2007 are those to which all current property owners in the subdivision agree to adhere (Yavapai County Recorder, Book 4546, p. 123, 10 October, 2007).**

The incorporation of Sedona added a new and more immediate layer (in addition to county, state, and federal) to the subdivision's governmental relationships. The streets and roads of the subdivision, for instance, now fell under city maintenance; the old wooden street signs, which for many years were repainted and refurbished by volunteers on the "Fence Posts/Signs Committee," were eventually replaced by more durable but less rustic city street signs. In 1998 the city established a "cut-through" between Mountain Shadows and Coffee Pot – a second entrance to the subdivision – in order to connect Sedona's western subdivisions (and to enable Sedona West residents to reach the Basha's shopping center) without having to take State Route 89A. For a time there was discussion of a road through the subdivision connecting it through Posse Grounds to Soldier's Pass as well; but this was strenuously opposed. Eventually, too, the city put in a sewer system under the streets – an issue that had bedeviled the subdivision for years.

In most respects, though, the basic issues of the eighties and nineties remained the same. Acreage in Posse Grounds was sold to the old Cottonwood-Oak Creek School District in 1977 – a change that, in turn, raised the issue of a buffer zone to separate the schoolgrounds from the eastern edge of the subdivision, as well as the matter of a walkway access between the two (residents rejected the notion of a connecting road). Light pollution, too, became a concern: as early as 1983 (before there was a city) representatives of eleven subdivisions met to form "Concerned Citizens of Sedona" in order to confront the problem of bright nighttime lighting by the county's Sedona Parks Commission in the Posse Grounds baseball fields. Two hundred families and organizations contributed \$30,000 for a court case that, in 1984, actually turned off the lights for a time. Three years later the court's injunction was lifted and the lights came back on – with new light baffles.

As early as 1995 residents of the subdivision began to realize that, with empty lots rapidly disappearing, trail access to the surrounding national forest would become increasingly difficult. A movement began to secure a private access trail, available and known primarily to Sedona West property owners, from the subdivision into the forest. This campaign lasted ten years and involved the Forest Service, the City of Sedona, significant private donations from property owners, and the SWPOA Board. In the end a vacant lot was purchased by the city and the private trail into the National Forest was established with the understanding that it would not appear on maps, and there would be no signage and no parking area. (There are none.) Once again, Sedona West residents came forward with thousands of dollars, while the City of Sedona contributed \$95,000 to purchase the land for the trail campaign.

A History of the Sedona West Subdivision and Property Owners Association
Curtis M. Hinsley

At the end of 1999 there were 246 houses in the subdivision; 86 buildable lots remained. Three years later only 60 buildable lots remained.

In 1996 the Board began providing dumpster service for Spring clean-up of the subdivision – a service which has expanded over the years to a semiannual service to the entire community. Partly to pay for this service, a Special Property Owners Meeting on December 16, 1997, voted (118-13) to make annual dues mandatory for all property owners, with the proviso that dues could be increased only by unanimous vote of the 12-member Board, and even then by no more than 20% at one time. (Dues were raised in 2001 to \$25, and to \$30 a decade later. At the annual meeting of November 3, 2003, there were 301 Association members; 300 had paid their dues.)

In 1998 a notarized amendment to the SWPOA Articles of Incorporation, recorded with the Arizona Corporation Commission, renewed the Sedona West Property Owners Association corporate existence in perpetuity.

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