

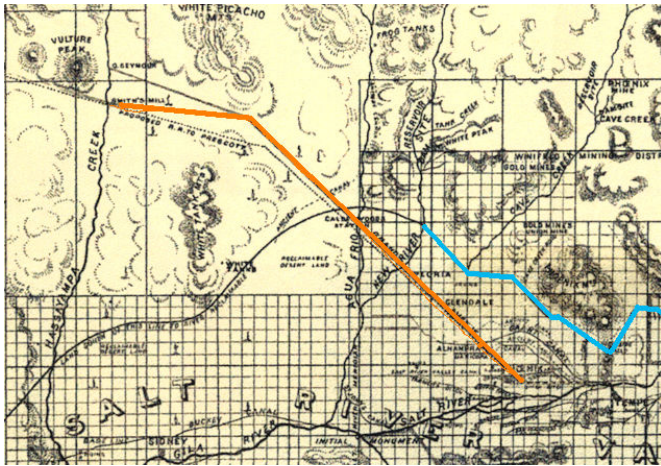
Traveling the Old Vulture Road – *Signs of the Past* by Ed Allen

The story begins with a mine discovered by Henry Wickenburg in 1863. Folklore tells us Henry awoke from his siesta ready to move on, but his mule continued to sleep. Henry reached for a rock to throw to wake him up – and found the rock quite heavy. On closer inspection he found it to be gold ore. Vultures circling overhead gave the strike its name. Little did he know then that he had discovered what would become one of the richest gold mines in all of Arizona. It wasn't long before the mine was producing \$700 worth of gold a day. Word spread, and by 1872 there were 117 miners at work, coming from 13 states and 16 countries.



The mine used mule power to transport the ore to the river, where other mules dragged heavy stone over the ore to crush it. And mules required feed. One of the miners, Jack Swilling, had come from the south where he fought in the Civil War. Crossing the Arizona desert, he came across fields of forage along the Salt River providing feed for the horses at Fort McDowell. He also recognized the long, straight swales through the desert as possible ancient canals dug by Indians hundreds of years before.

Preferring farming to mining, Swilling returned to the area along the Salt River that had signs of prehistoric canals. He began to clear the ones nearest the Salt River and soon was growing crops needed at the mine to feed the mules. The wagons that carried forage to the mine created what became known as the Vulture Road – the orange line on the map at left.



Wickenburg soon became a prosperous city along the Hassayampa River. Swilling's discovery of ancient canals had drawn many to the Salt River 70 miles to the east. The desert wasn't a barren wasteland -- it only needed water to make it bloom and grow crops and orchards of all kinds. An Englishman observed the area was like a Phoenix bird rising from the ashes – and "Phoenix" became the name of the emerging city.

Completion of the Arizona Canal in 1887 (blue line on map) brought water further west and north, as far as today's Arrowhead Mall. It opened 80,000 acres to cultivation. Default on payment of its bonds, however, resulted in the canal being acquired by William J Murphy. Known as the founder of Glendale, he created a 100-foot wide, "grand avenue" running northwest from central Phoenix to impress potential farmers who came to check out the land. It extended through the settlements of Alhambra and Glendale all the way to Peoria, giving a grand new name to the old Vulture Road.

In 1890 mule-drawn streetcars were put into service by Murphy's firm. The number of people moving into the area steadily increased. Four farmer families from Peoria, IL had attracted others to the area, and named their settlement after their former hometown. A group of 70 River Brethren families founded Glendale as a temperance colony in 1891.

A rail link connected Prescott and Phoenix in 1895 and its tracks paralleled the Vulture Road. Two men from Wisconsin – a wealthy mill owner and his chief engineer decided to invest in the area and purchased adjoining sections of 640 acres each in 1892. The railroad cut across the corner of one of the sections, and they negotiated with it to build a water stop on their land. They named it "Marinette" after their home town in Wisconsin. It became the forerunner of Sun City.

The name "Vulture Road" became a memory as Grand Avenue began to live up to its promise. Paving started in 1919 and over the following years it became the main route first to Los Angeles, and then the link to Las Vegas. One sad aspect of its history came in 1940 when it became the dividing line for Japanese internment during WW II. Japanese-Americans living south or west of Grand had to move to the internment centers; those living to the north or east did not.