

Arizona's Home School Roots

The history of home education in Arizona extends back to territorial days. School buildings were few and far between on the vast southwestern frontier. When the first Territorial Legislature met at Prescott in 1864, there were three small private schools that early settlers had set up in Prescott, Mojave and LaPaz; the mission school at San Xavier; and three parochial schools in Tucson. However, most of these did not remain open for very long.

On November 11, 1867, the Pima County Supervisors voted to establish Pima County School District Number One and the first public school in Arizona. This school lasted only several months and its doors were closed in 1868. When newly appointed Territorial Governor Anson Peacely-Killen Safford arrived in 1869, he officially reported that no public school existed in the territory.

Governor Safford grew up on a farm in Illinois. His education consisted of home study and travel, with little formal schooling. Motivated by the "compulsory education for all" dogma of the times, Safford set out to develop a comprehensive public school system in Arizona. The self-sufficient pioneers who settled the area were not easily won over. By the end of 1872, only eight public schools had been established. Since many families lived on ranches miles away from the nearest school, it was not unusual for children to be educated at home.

Sharlot Hall, born in 1870, was self-taught and highly literate. Although she attended a few terms in a log-and-adobe schoolhouse near her family's Lynx Creek homestead and boarded in Prescott for one year of school in town, most of her learning took place on the ranch. In addition to being a poet and newspaper reporter, Hall was appointed Territorial Historian, the first woman to hold a public office in Arizona.

Henry Fountain Ashurst, one of Arizona's first two United States senators, was born in 1874 to a pioneer ranching family. Ashurst briefly attended public school in Flagstaff, but most of his early education was provided by ranch hands of diverse backgrounds. From the age of 12, he worked as a range rider and at various other jobs. Ashurst became known as a gifted orator who loved to quote Shakespeare. The editor of Ashurst's diary, George F. Sparks, explained: "His real teachers were the centuries of eloquence, the classical writers whom he never tired of reading....From them he acquired the long view across the sea of politics, and the loving command of rich language that flowed through a lifetime of oratory." Barry Goldwater, another famous Arizona senator, characterized Ashurst by saying: "He is a living example of the benefits that come to men who live with freedom and independence of thought...and will serve as a growing example to the generations which follow."

Herbert V. Young, born in 1887, was schooled at home as a child. He later became secretary to the general manager of the United Verde Copper Company in Jerome, and author of *Water By the Inch: Adventures of a Pioneer Family on an Arizona Desert Homestead*. Young dedicated his memoirs "To my father and mother, whose love, care, and teaching did so much to shape the lives of their children." He wrote: "[We] explored the three R's under Mother's tutelage....She was a good teacher, and had concentrated on reading as the base for all other learning, though she had not neglected writin' and 'rithmetic."

On February 14, 1912, Arizona became the last of the contiguous states to join the Union. Due to the foresight of the original state legislators, home schooling was legally recognized when statehood was granted. The school attendance law in 1912 read: "Every person who has custody of a child between the ages of eight and sixteen years shall send the child to a public school for the full time school is in session within the district in which the child resides....[except if] the child is instructed at home by a competent teacher in the subjects given in the common schools of the state [or if] the child is attending a regularly organized private or parochial school taught by competent teachers for the full time that the public schools of the district are in session."

Arizona home educators can be proud of our rich home school heritage. The state of Arizona was uniquely suited for adventurous men and women who were willing to think creatively and blaze new trails. Arizonans have always been boldly independent. This same pioneering spirit is reflected in today's statewide home schooling movement that is taking us back to our educational roots.

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Teri Ann Berg Olsen, home educator and author of *Learning for Life: Educational Words of Wisdom*, has been researching Arizona's home school history for her next book. Learn more at <http://www.knowledgehouse.info>.