

The Morrison Story

Robert E. Morrison came to the Arizona Territory in 1882 and settled on a ranch near St. Johns. In 1891 Morrison moved to Prescott where he remained until his death in 1927. During his almost 45 years in Arizona, Morrison established himself as one of the State's preeminent lawyers and public servants.

The oldest of six children, Morrison was born in ... to Jane Clark and Alexander L. Morrison, who had immigrated to the United States from Ireland when he was seventeen years old. Soon afterward, Alexander joined a New York army regiment to fight in the Mexican War. Following his discharge in ..., Alexander took up chair-making in New York. He later moved to Chicago and, while continuing his trade as a chair maker, studied law. In 1869 Alexander passed the Illinois bar and practiced law in Chicago until 1881.ⁱ

According to a family historian, Alexander Morrison was a fiery, little Irishman with an intense hatred of the British. He was a member of a group which pledged to free Ireland from British control and returned to Ireland in ... for that purpose. However, Alexander was captured and imprisoned shortly after arriving. While in prison, he and his fellow members pledged to name their first daughter, "Erin." They returned to the United States in irons. Yet Alexander's first daughter was indeed named Erin, and this tradition continued for several generations.ⁱⁱ

Back in Chicago, Alexander soon became politically connected, and in 1881 President Chester Arthur appointed him to the position of Territorial Marshal for New Mexico. So Alexander and his wife moved to Santa Fe, where they were later joined by some of their children. Within a couple of years, several of the Morrison sons had established a ranch at the headwaters of the Little Colorado River in the Escadilla Mountains near Lake Erin in Northeastern Arizona.

Meanwhile, their eldest son Robert had followed in his father's footsteps, graduating from law school at Union College in 1877. He practiced law in his native Chicago until 1883, when he went west to help his brothers on the ranch in Arizona. Soon, though,

Robert was admitted to practice law in Apache County. His name appears for the first time in county court records as legal counsel in 1884. At this time, the county seat was St. John's, a farming and ranching community of less than 500 with an interesting history.

In 1879 the Arizona State Legislature had created Apache County by carving out a portion of Yavapai County. The early period of the county was rife with political intrigue, since it consisted of a complex mixture of Latino sheep men, cattle ranchers (many of whom were from Texas), Mormon settlers who had been ordered to do so along the Little Colorado River, and an eclectic group of settlers who had come west to seek their fortune. Many within these different groups of settlers harbored longstanding resentments, and a constant struggle for political advantages in the area ensued. By 1884, the county was under the control of a corrupt gang known as the "St. John's Ring," which was headed by Solomon Barth, a local merchant and sheep man. The county's many rustlers and cattlemen soon became frustrated with this gang and the inadequate law enforcement of Sheriff Don Lorenzo Hubbell.

So before the 1886 county election, a group of these cattlemen organized a reform ticket, named the "Citizen's Ticket," in order to oust the "St. John's Ring" and establish law and order in Apache County. Their ticket boasted Commodore Perry Owens for Sheriff, to replace the frequently absent and ineffective Hubbell. Owens, a native Tennessean with a reputation as a fearless marksman, had settled in the Arizona Territory around 1880. The "Citizen's Ticket" was comprised of several other prominent Apache County citizens, including the newly settled Robert E. Morrison for Probate Judge and School Superintendent. In opposition, the "St. John's Ring" sponsored the "Equal Rights Ticket," which included several of its own members and Sheriff Hubbell. Both tickets conducted spirited campaigns, with each ticket supported by one of the area's newspapers. In the end, the "Citizen's Ticket" won all but one of the races for county officers, and Owens beat Hubbell by 71 votes.

The new officers made a concerted effort to clean up Apache County. First they turned their attention toward Solomon Barth, who had been indicted prior to the election for defrauding the county. Under the new administration his trial proceeded, and he was

convicted and sentenced to the Yuma prison. Then early in 1887, grand jury indictments were issued against twenty-five troublesome individuals, most charged with rustling.

To accelerate the cleanup, the Apache County Cattlemen's Association, impatient to bring law and order to the county, allocated \$3,000 from its own treasury for a range detective. The Association hired the deputized J. V. Brighton, who in June of that year had shot and killed Ike Clanton, one of the surviving members of the Clanton Gang of OK Corral fame.ⁱⁱⁱ According to Will Barnes, Secretary of the Association, Brighton's killing of Ike Clanton brought fear to the hearts of these bad men, and they started to leave the area to get away from "the unknown officer who shot first and read the warrant over the dead bodies of the men he was after."^{iv}

Two other incidents contributed to cleaning up Apache County. One was the shootout in Holbrook, where Commodore Owens killed Andy Cooper. Owens carried a warrant for the arrest of Cooper, who participated in the Pleasant Valley War and was allegedly involved in rustling activities. Owens had avoided confrontation with Cooper, but in September of 1887 after being pressured to serve the warrant, he found Cooper at his mother's home in Holbrook. When Cooper appeared at the door with gun in hand, Owens shot and killed him and two other occupants that Owens said were carrying guns and seriously wounded a third. This incident elevated Owens to the status of a legendary gunman in western history.^v

The second incident was the hanging of Jeff Wilson, Jimmy Scott, and Jamie Stott for alleged involvement in rustling activities.^{vi} The hangings were carried out by a group of vigilantes which included J. D. Houck, Jim Tewksbury, one of the principals in the Pleasant Valley War, and Tom Horn, who was later hired as a range detective by Wyoming cattlemen, but then hung for murdering a child. Following the shootout at Holbrook, these hangings made it clear that Apache County was no longer a hospitable environment for thieves and crooks.

But not everyone agreed that the cleanup of Apache County was complete. On November 17, 1887, an anonymous article appeared in the Albuquerque Daily Citizen entitled "Run by a Ring." The author alleged a variety of disreputable activities by the

Apache County District Attorney, Harris Baldwin, and his brother-in-law, T. W. Johnson. The article claimed that Baldwin and Johnson were participants in a scheme to inflate the tax assessments of the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad to a level which assured the railroad would protest and that Baldwin recommended to the County Board of Supervisors his brother-in-law be hired to defend the lawsuit. It was also claimed that indicted criminals were advised to dismiss their lawyers and hire Johnson to defend them and that they would receive more favorable treatment from the District Attorney. Several criminals who hired Johnson to defend them were permitted to plead guilty and leave the county rather than go to prison.

After determining that the anonymous author was Robert E. Morrison, Johnson filed a civil suit in Apache County for libel, and the District Attorney obtained an indictment against Morrison for criminal libel. Morrison's defense was that the charges they claimed to be libelous were in fact true. But after a short jury trial, a judgment was entered against Morrison for \$500. The impartiality of the trial judge, James H. Wright, was called into question after he and Morrison's attorney exchanged hostile comments at the conclusion of the trial.^{vii} So Morrison appealed the lower court's decision to the Territorial Supreme Court, which reversed the judgment and ordered a new trial.^{viii} Robert E. Morrison was, however, convicted of criminal libel.

A review of the Apache County court records and the newspapers for the period in question suggests that the basic facts put forth in "Run by a Ring" were essentially correct. Yet there is little recorded evidence to confirm Morrison's charges of criminal intent in the case of Baldwin and Johnson. However, in his autobiography the territorial pioneer, Alfred Franklin Banta, who was elected Apache County District Attorney in 1888 in a race against Robert E. Morrison, does confirm the scheme to inflate the railroad tax assessment in order to provide a mechanism for siphoning county funds, as legal fees, to Baldwin and his brother-in-law. After his election, Banta had obtained approval from the Board of Supervisors to enter into an agreement with the railroad to dismiss the litigation and reinstate a prior agreement on the level of railroad tax assessments. He convinced the Board of "the rotten condition in which they were floundering: that the

schemers had gotten up an endless chain of graft.”^{ix} The new Morrison trial ordered by the Territorial Supreme Court never occurred. The cases were dismissed, and Morrison reached a settlement on the civil and criminal cases.. The details of the settlement are unknown.

Not long after this sordid affair, on November 26, 1890, Robert married Johnnie Stinson Logan, the widow of W. T. Logan, who was a business partner in the Morrison ranch near Lake Erin. Logan had died on May 9, 1889 from an overdose of morphine which he had self-administered to relieve the pain of a ?felon? on his finger. His widow Johnnie returned to her native Kansas after his death. Robert followed her to Kansas, where they were married shortly thereafter. The couple soon returned to St. John’s, and Robert resumed his legal practice. But in 1891, disheartened by his defeat in the 1888 county election in which he had run against Banta on an anti-Mormon ticket for District Attorney, as well as his loss of the civil and criminal libel suits, the Morrisons left Territorial St. John’s and moved to Prescott, where Robert reestablished his law practice.

Morrison quickly became involved in Yavapai County politics and was elected its District Attorney in 1892. His opponent in the race was Democrat Reese M. Ling, a native of Ohio who had moved to Arizona in 1884.^x Morrison won the race by 200 votes in an election that saw both Republicans and Democrats elected to Yavapai County offices. In 1894 Morrison ran for reelection against Democrat John Frank Wilson and won by 78 votes. A few years later in 1902, Morrison would run for Congress against this same Wilson.

Now settled in Prescott, the Morrisons had three children: Erin Morrison, born on July 2, 1892, Emmett T. Morrison, born on December 22, 1893, and Juanita Morrison, born on August 5, 1896. Unfortunately, Johnnie died on August 13, 1896, from complications with her last pregnancy, leaving Robert a widower with a newborn and three small children, including a son from her previous marriage.

Later that year, following the election of President William McKinley, Morrison was appointed to the prestigious position of United States Attorney for Territorial Arizona. He was confirmed by the U. S. Senate on February 8, 1898. Although he served with

distinction, Morrison did not seek reappointment, explaining that it had been an imposition on his family responsibilities and had reduced the fees from his law practice.^{xi}

During a Territorial business trip to Washington, D. C., Robert stopped in Chicago to see old acquaintances and made contact with Lizzie Kneipp. Robert and Lizzie had been childhood friends, and Robert had practiced law in Chicago with Lizzie's deceased husband, Mathew Charles Kneipp.^{xii} Mathew had abandoned Lizzie, and they subsequently divorced. Lizzie and her two children, Leon and Inez, had then moved into her parents' home in Chicago. To support her family, Lizzie had begun working as a sales clerk. When Robert and Lizzie reconnected, Robert proposed marriage, but Lizzie felt that she was unable to move to Arizona because she was the sole caregiver for her widowed father. However, Lizzie's father died shortly after Robert's marriage proposal. So after confirming that Mathew Charles Kneipp was indeed deceased in order to satisfy Catholic requirements for the remarriage of divorced women, Robert E. Morrison and Elizabeth Augusta Klar "Lizzie" Kneipp were married in Chicago on August 9, 1898.

Lizzie and her sixteen-year-old daughter, Inez, promptly moved to Prescott with Robert, who soon adopted Inez. She entered St. Joseph's Academy in Prescott and would graduate in May of 1901. At the time of the move, Lizzie's eighteen year old son, Leon, remained in Chicago. But at the urging of his stepfather, Leon ultimately moved to Prescott and took a job as a Forest Ranger in the newly created Prescott Forest Reserve. He began in April of 1900 at the low monthly salary of \$60.00, half of which he would spend just to feed his horse.^{xiii} Yet Leon advanced rapidly and took on positions of increasing responsibility. After 46 years of distinguished service, Leon retired from the National Forest Service as the Assistant Chief of the Forest Service in Charge of Land Acquisition. Leon Kneipp died in 1966 just shy of his 86th birthday.^{xiv}

When Robert and Lizzie married, he had promised her domestic help and a new home in Prescott. So shortly after their arrival, Lizzie began planning the family home. In 1902 the Morrison Queen Anne-style home was completed at 300 S. Marina. Bette Washington and her two young children moved into the Morrisons' new home. Bette, described in the 1900 U. S. Census reports as "colored help," helped with the housework and care-taking

of the Morrison children. Today this house is one of Prescott's most outstanding territorial homes. It was certified for the National Register of Historic Places in 1978 and was refurbished in the 1990s.

The same year their home was completed, Robert E. Morrison ran for Arizona's U. S. Congressional seat against John Frank Wilson. Born in Tennessee on May 7, 1846, to a slave holding family, Wilson had fought for the South in the Civil War. Rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel, he would thereafter become known as Colonel Wilson. After the war, he had a variety of occupations before finally becoming a lawyer. Wilson practiced law in Arkansas before relocating to Territorial Arizona, where he established a successful practice. Like many other territorial lawyers, Wilson had an eclectic practice, but tended to specialize in mining law. In 1896 Territorial Governor B. J. Franklin appointed Wilson to Territorial Attorney General, a position in which he served until a change of parties in 1897, when he returned to his law practice. In 1898 Wilson challenged incumbent Mark Smith for the Democratic nomination to Congress. However, Smith withdrew from the race because of his wife's poor health, and Wilson became the nominee. His opponent was Republican Alexander O. Brodie, well known in Territorial Arizona as the commander of the Rough Riders who had succeeded Theodore Roosevelt. After a campaign in which both candidates visited the entire territory, Wilson had 8,212 votes and Brodie had 7,384. Although Brodie lost this race, his former commander, President Roosevelt, appointed him Territorial Governor, effective July 1, 1902.^{xv}

Mark Smith again sought the Democratic nomination in 1900 and opposed Congressman Colonel Wilson. The delegates to the September 12 convention were unable to select a nominee, so Smith and Wilson continued to campaign for the nomination until October 12, when Wilson withdrew to unite the party.^{xvi} Smith went on to win the General Election, but elected not to run again. So at the 1902 Democratic convention, former Congressman Colonel Wilson was nominated by acclamation. His Republican opponent would be Robert E. Morrison,^{xvii}

Both Wilson and Morrison conducted spirited campaigns, traveling around the entire Territory. A delegation of local party officials would meet them when they arrived in a

town, and a rally would be held. Lizzie Morrison, often accompanying her husband on these campaign trips, would even meet with a group of the town ladies. A party dignitary would introduce the candidates, and they would give a rousing speech. Both Wilson and Morrison were widely known for their oratorical skills, and newspapers reported that they were enthusiastically received. Yet the two candidates made only one joint appearance – in Holbrook.

The newspapers of the era were highly partisan, and the reports on the campaign appearances, depending on the paper's political leanings, contained either complimentary or derogatory observations about each candidate. Yet the focus of the campaign remained on two key issues: the plight of the workingman and statehood for the Territory. Both Wilson and Morrison felt that their election would improve Territorial Arizona's chances for statehood. Since Oklahoma and New Mexico, both also seeking statehood, would likely elect Republican congressmen, Wilson felt that electing a Democrat to the U. S. Senate would improve the Territory's chances. Morrison, of course, held a contrary view. Former Congressman Smith returned from a trip to Europe in time to support Wilson's campaign and also argued that a Democrat would be the most useful in securing passage of a statehood bill.^{xviii}

The final election tally was 9,716 for Wilson, 9,239 for Morrison, and 733 for minor party candidates.^{xix} Having won a close race, Wilson went on to serve his second term in the 58th Congress, while Morrison returned to his law practice. In 1904 Wilson chose not to run for reelection, and former Congressman Smith beat Republican Benjamin A. Fowler in a very close election to fill the empty congressional seat.^{xx} When he left office in 1905, Wilson also returned to his law practice.

Morrison, however, remained active in Territorial politics. He was elected Yavapai County Attorney in 1906, and in that year he chaired the Yavapai County Republican delegation to the Bisbee convention and was unanimously chosen the permanent chairman of the convention. In a letter to his friend Governor J. H. Kibbey, he responded to complaints that the rights of delegates to the convention who supported a joint statehood resolution were “ruthlessly trampled upon.” After reviewing the convention

process, Morrison asserted that “there was absolutely no coercion or unparliamentary (sic) treatment of joint statehood delegations in the convention.”^{xxi}

While Morrison pursued his political and legal endeavors, his family was maturing. Sometime after she graduated from St. Joseph’s Academy, Inez began seeing Dr. John K. McDonnell, who had arrived in Prescott in 1892 after graduating from Dartmouth College. McDonnell initially worked for Harry Brisley as a pharmacist. However, by the time he and Inez met, he worked at Crown King. The two were married in 1904. Their daughter Roberta was born in 1905 and was soon followed by Kathryn in 1906 and Betty in 1908.

Unfortunately not long after this, Morrison would experience a series of tragedies. In 1910 his wife Lizzie died from Bright’s disease after a prolonged illness.^{xxii} Lizzie, a leading soprano at St. Patrick’s in her native Chicago, would also be missed by the choir at the Catholic Church of Prescott. Morrison’s son-in-law, Dr. McDonnell, died in 1911 from a ruptured appendix in Jerome, where he had moved Inez and their family for his medical practice. Inez and her three children then moved back to Prescott to live in the house on Marina Street, where she assumed management of the household.

Morrison’s son Emmett attended Georgetown University from 1911 to 1914 and then went to law school at Northwestern University. Afterward, he returned to Prescott to practice law with his father. Emmett also served in World War I, but despite letters of recommendation from many of Arizona’s political elite, he was not admitted to officers’ training. In 1921 Emmett married Libby Akin, and their daughter Erin Mary Morrison was born in 1923. Yet after her birth, something happened that made Emmett leave Prescott and abandon his family. There is reason to believe that he may have embezzled money from one of his father’s clients.

Soon thereafter, Morrison began a downward spiral of health and financial problems that would lead to his death in 1927. Shortly before, he had mortgaged the Morrison home to a bank in order to raise funds to cover his debts. Morrison then transferred the title to the bank with an understanding that he could live there and pay rent until the bank sold the house. But after disposing of all of his assets, there were still insufficient funds to

pay all of his creditors, who in the end received less than 50% of their claims against his estate. This was a tragic conclusion to a distinguished career of an individual who had always prided himself on his integrity and professionalism and who had struggled to rectify his son's misdeeds. Emmett did not attend his father's funeral. Later Emmett's adult daughter was unable to trace her father's wanderings after he left Prescott.

In addition to his professional and political legacy in Arizona, one of Robert E. Morrison's most enduring contributions is the role he played in the Rough Rider Monument that today graces the Yavapai County Court House Plaza. Morrison was one of the commission members appointed by the Arizona Legislature to select a suitable memorial for Arizona's Rough Riders. He volunteered to go east to consult with a sculptor, but became discouraged when he was unable to find one who would complete the project for the amount of funds allotted by the legislature. However, noted sculptor Solon Borglum heard of the project and offered to do the monument. When Morrison told him that they had only \$10,000, Borglum is reported to have said, "Mr. Morrison, you shall have your monument." What is reputed to be one of Solon Borglum's finest works now sits upon a piece of Prescott granite, facing north as a proud tribute to the Rough Riders and Captain William O'Neill. The Monument appropriately includes, among other names of the Memorial Commission, Robert E. Morrison.^{xxiii}

ⁱ Dr. James H. McClintock, *Arizona – The Nation's Youngest Commonwealth Within a Land of Ancient Culture*, 1916 (Volume III). Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Co. (pp. 175 – 176).

ⁱⁱ Kneipp, Leon F. (1947, August). *Family History Notes*,. Unpublished manuscript a copy is in the possession of the author.

ⁱⁱⁱ Edwards, Harold L. (1991. October). The Man who Killed Ike Clanton. *True West*. (Volume 38). (pp. 24-29).

^{iv} Barnes, Will C.. (1941). *Apaches & Longhorn*. Los Angeles: The Ward Ritchie Press. (pp.132 – 134).

^v Ball, Larry D. Commodore Perry Owens – The Man Behind the Legend. *The Journal of Arizona History*, (pp. 27-56).

^{vi} However, recent research has raised questions about their guilt. See Hanchett, Leland J., Jr, (1993). *The Crooked Trail to Holbrook*. Phoenix: Arrowhead Press.

^{vii} Apache Review, May 30, 1888

^{viii} Johnson v. Morrison, 3 Ariz. 109, 21 Pac. 465, (1889).

^{ix} Banta, Albert Franklin: *Arizona Pioneer*, Edited by Frank D. Reeve. (September, 1953). *Historical Society of New Mexico*, Publications in History. (Vol. XIV).Albuquerque. (pp. 119 – 124).

^x Ling had been one of the first graduates from the Normal School in Tempe, where he then taught for several years before going to law school at the University of Michigan. After law school, Ling practiced in Chicago for six months before returning to Prescott.

^{xi} Goff, John S. (1988) *Arizona Territorial Official*. (Vol IV). Cave Creek: Black Mountain Press. (pp 94 – 95).

^{xii} After Mathew Charles Kneip left his family the family changed the spelling of their name to Kneipp

^{xiii} Kneipp,

^{xiv} http://www.foresthistory.org/Research/usfscoll/peopleWO_Staffs/Kneipp.html

^{xv} Goff, John S. (1986). *Arizona Territorial Officials*. (Vol. III). Cave Creek: Black Mountain Press,

^{xvi} Wagoner, Jay J. (1970), *Arizona Territory 1862 – 1912 – A Political History*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press. (pp. 361 – 362).

^{xvii} who had won the nomination over William F. Nichols in a close vote ...Goff. (Vol. III). (pp. 164 – 165).

^{xviii} Wagoner. (p. 400)

^{xix} Goff. (Vol. III). (p.165).

^{xx} Ibid.. (pp.140 – 142).

^{xxi} Morrison, Robert E., unpublished letter to Hon. J. H. Kibbey dated September 12, 1906 a copy is in the possession of the author

^{xxii} Historical classification of kidney diseases that is no longer in use

^{xxiii} The Arizona Rough Rider Monument and Captain W. O. O'Neill published by the Prescott Evening Courier for Sharlot. Hall