

Making a Home on Oak Creek



Jim and Maggie Thompson had seven sons and two daughters. Six of them are pictured here (standing behind their parents) along with four of their grandchildren.

The good climate and available water drew early settlers to Oak Creek in the late 1800s. John James “Jim” Thompson filed the first claim in Oak Creek Canyon under the federal Homestead Act. In 1876 he asserted “squatter’s rights” to land on the east side of Oak Creek, opposite Indian Gardens.

Born in Ireland, Thompson came to America when he was 11 years old. After being wounded in the Civil War as a young man, he moved west working cattle drives and running a ferry on a tributary of the Colorado River in Nevada. Eventually he sold the ferry and moved to Oak Creek.

Thompson built a cabin and moved his family here in 1887. He and his wife Margaret (Maggie) had a son, John Franklin (Frank), the first settler child born in the Sedona area. Jim Thompson built one of the first roads through the canyon and enticed other people to settle in Oak Creek.

Indians Meet the Pioneers

The *Dilzhé’e’* (Tonto Apache) and *Wipukpaya* (Yavapai) were American Indian groups who occupied huge areas in central Arizona; their territories overlapped in the Verde Valley.

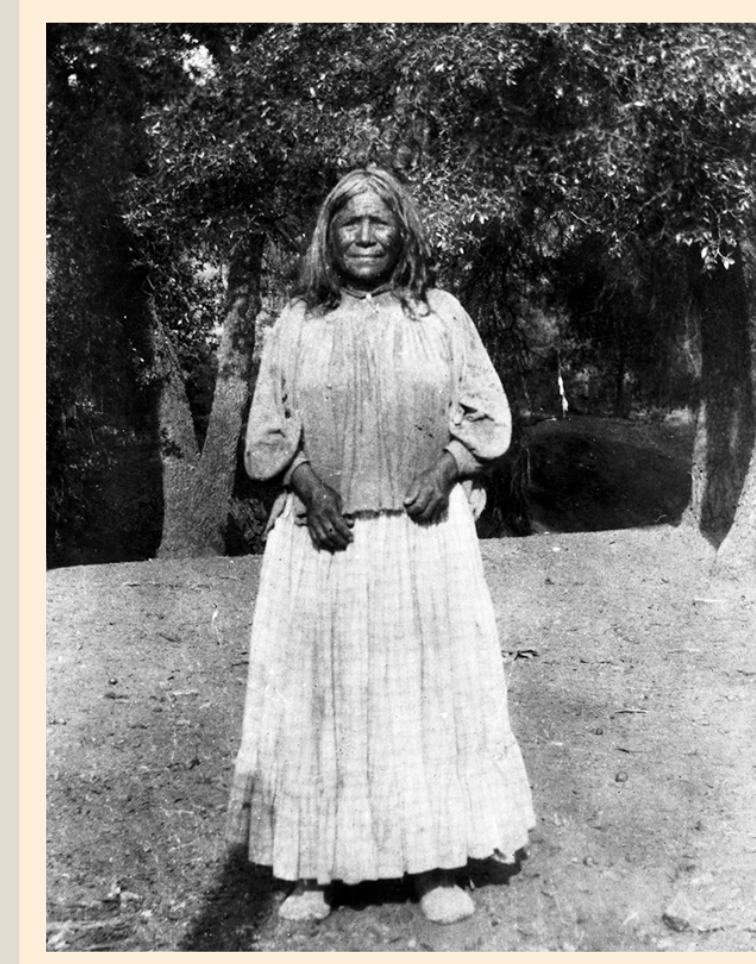
Spanish explorer Antonio de Espejo recorded meeting the Wipukpaya in the area in 1583. Settler Jim Thompson encountered the *Dilzhé’e’* in Oak Creek Canyon when he arrived in 1876. Their gardens of corn, beans, and squash grew on the land Thompson chose to homestead, which he named Indian Gardens.

The *Dilzhé’e’* and Wipukpaya moved in small groups with the seasons, hunting game, and gathering plants. Some also cultivated gardens. They collected acorns, wild grapes, cactus fruit, mesquite beans, pinyon nuts, as well as the agave, or century plant. Agave hearts were harvested when the flowering stalks began to grow in spring. The artichoke-shaped hearts were roasted in huge rock pits used year after year. The agave was shared among families; some was eaten freshly cooked, but most was dried and stored for later consumption.

The lives of American Indians changed dramatically in 1863 when gold was discovered near Prescott, Arizona. Hostilities developed as miners and white settlers moved in. The U.S. Army established Fort Verde on the Verde River, and General George Crook staged a campaign against the Indians in the 1870s. The *Dilzhé’e’* and Wipukpaya were rounded up and forcibly marched east to the San Carlos Reservation in the winter of 1875. They were allowed to return to the Verde Valley, their ancestral homeland, in the early 1900s and have lived here ever since.



Three generations of Apaches pose in front of a wickiup, their traditional dome-shaped dwelling.



Apache woman circa 1935



An Apache child peeks out from a traditional Tonto Apache basket.



George Randall, who served in the U.S. Army during the 1870s, stands in front of a cabin circa 1905.