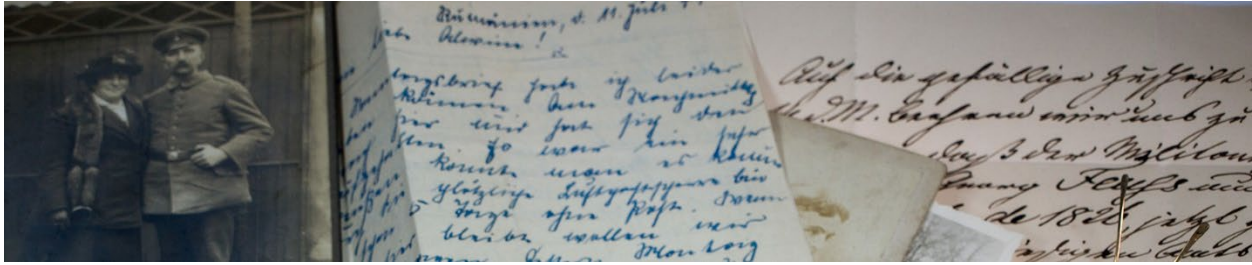


A Candle in a Kyack Box



You never know what kind of adventure a day in the Gila County Historical Museum will bring you. You might be working as a docent to share the history of our area that is within the walls of our museum or searching for an artifact that someone thinks that we might have or looking for a lost ancestor.

It's finding the lost ancestors that I find my most rewards come from. To know who we are and what makes us do what we do, we can look at those that came before us. Almost daily we have someone come in who is seeking to find those that lived here at some time. They are looking to see where their ancestor may have worked, where they may have lived, any stories about what may have happened while their ancestor lived here, and most important where they are buried.

I have felt many times that it isn't just by accident that I have been working when a request for family history is assigned to the museum and especially to me. "A Candle in a Kyack Box" is one of those stories, the Balis family from Sandy, Utah is one of those stories. They called looking for information on the Alma Kerby family that lived in Kerby, Arizona. I returned their call to see what information they had and what information they were looking for. I found that Alma Kerby was Balis' great grandfather and most of her information came from a booklet called "A Candle in a Kyack Box, The remarkable Story of Lee," by Joe Kerby. She told me that Alma had immigrated from St. Helier, Jersey, Channel Islands in 1858. He was one of the pioneers that crossed the plains in the last Mormon handcart company of George Connor. She stated Alma had lived in Utah where he had married and had two daughters. Alma's wife had died. He left the two girls with their grandmother. Balis is a granddaughter of one of the girls. Balis knew that Alma had immigrated to the town of Smithville, Arizona now called Pima, Arizona and then to Kerby Arizona. While in Smithville Alma married Amelia Rogers together, they had 10 children.

I knew I had heard a story like this, so I set to work turning over stones as the saying goes. My brother in law's mother was a Kerby so I started with him. I found

that Alma was a brother to his great grandfather and yes, he had some information. He had in his files an article written by Paul Machula that I had given him. It really is a small world. The article stated that Alma was the first Mormon buried in the Globe cemetery and was in the last company of handcarts to cross the plains. Further research found that Alma and Amelia were the parents of Rita Arney, a long-time teacher in Globe. I had worked with Rita at Central school and knew her family. Another of Alma and Amelia's daughters was Alice Kerby Elam the mother of the well-known actor Jack Elam.

I hadn't yet found Kerby, Arizona. In Joe Kerby's book "A Candle in a Kyack Box" it stated "the Kerby Homestead was the only place in that area which was directly on the main road between Globe and Roosevelt Dam" so we asked one of the local ranchers LeRoy Tucker if he knew anything about where it might be. He said that he lived on the Kerby homestead and in fact one of Alma and Amelia's children had been buried next to his home and he had maintained the small grave for many years and would love to talk to and show Balis his homestead.

I felt prepared for the visit that Balis had planned for late November. We met Balis and her husband at the museum and shared the information I had found. The joy of finally being at the last place this family had lived brought great joy to Balis to be able to be at her ancestor's homestead, to walk where they had walk, to be able to lay flowers at a lost ancestor's grave.

The Balis family was now connected with their past in Gila County. I also felt connection of family and place. We gained new history records for the museum, we found the post office town of Kerby, Arizona, that was almost forgotten in time. We traded stories of family and land with long time ranchers, the Tuckers, that have taken care of the Kerby homestead for years. Maybe most importantly we had a look into the past and saw how that past affected the future.