



**Blue & Gray:  
The Story of Jack Swilling**

# Jack Swilling

- John W. Swilling born April 1, 1830 at Red House Plantation, Anderson, South Carolina
- Parents: George Washington Swilling and Margaret Farrar, owners of the plantation
- 1843: Family moved to Georgia
- 1847: Jack and a brother joined a Georgia mounted battalion (as a Musician) in the Mexican-American War, served 1 year
- 1848: Jack enlisted in the Georgia Cavalry

# Jack Swilling: Married Man

- 1852: Married Mary Jane Gray in Wetumpka, Alabama
- 1853: Daughter Elizabeth was born

# Jack Swilling: Trouble Maker

- 1854: In a bar-room fight, Jack suffers a fractured skull and a gunshot; bullet lodged in his back, which is never removed
- Injuries lead him to dependency on morphine and alcohol to alleviate the pain
- April 1, 1856: unidentified event causes Jack to leave Alabama (without his wife and daughter, who he never saw again)
- These two events determine the course of the rest of his life

# Jack Swilling: Gold Prospector

- Summer 1857: Jack joins the Leach Wagon Road Company in Fort Smith, Arkansas as a teamster
- Summer 1858: Jack arrives in Mesilla, New Mexico Territory
- Catches gold fever, moves near Los Angeles on word of a gold rush there
- Late 1858: joins Jacob Snively's crew working the gold find at Gila City, Arizona, on the Gila River, 19 miles upriver from the Colorado

# Jack Swilling

- "Enterprising men hurried to the spot with barrels of whiskey and billiard tables; Jewish merchants came with ready-made clothing and fancy wares; traders crowded in with wagons-loads of pork and beans; and gamblers came with cards and monte-tables. There was everything in Gila City within a few months but a church and a jail." – J. Ross Brown, 1861
- While panning, Jack also worked for the Butterfield Overland Mail Company.



# Jack Swilling: Gila Rangers Captain

- Jack was elected Captain of the Gila Rangers, a militia formed to protect against Apache stock raids on miners and the stage company.
- January 1860: Swilling led the Gila Rangers into the Bradshaw Mountains to chastise Apache raiders. Discovered the Hassayampa River, some gold deposits, and areas suitable for farming and ranching, but the area was too remote and dangerous at the time

# Jack Swilling: Arizona Guards

- In 1860 the Gila River changed course and the gold fields panned out, so Jack followed Colonel Jacob Snively to the gold fields at Pinos Altos, New Mexico, where he mined and ran a saloon and dance hall
- Union Army withdrew at the start of the Civil War, so local militia was formed, the Arizona Guards, for defense against Apache attack
- Jack was second in command, a First Lieutenant

# Jack Swilling: Confederate Officer

- March 1861: Provisional Confederate Territory of Arizona proclaimed
- July 27, 1861: Confederate force under Lt. Col. John Baylor, 2<sup>nd</sup> Texas Mounted Rifles, captures Mesilla and Fort Fillmore
- Arizona Guard is absorbed into the Confederate Army, with Swilling commissioned a First Lieutenant
- September 27, 1861: Battle of Pinos Altos: 300 Apaches are repulsed by 15 Confederates of the Arizona Guard. Swilling said to be one of the 15

# Jack Swilling: Capture of McCleave

- October 1861: Swilling becomes commander of Arizona Guards
- Arizona Guards among the force of Capt. Sherrod Hunter that occupied Tucson February 28, 1862
- Swilling, in command of a Confederate force, followed the Butterfield Overland Mail route west, burning hay at the stage stations along the way, to prevent their use by Union forces of the California Column
- On March 6, Swilling's force captured Union Captain William McCleave and 9 men at the Pima Villages

# Jack Swilling: Stanwix Station

- March 30, Swilling's force engaged Union force of 272 at Stanwix Station, 80 miles east of Yuma, and then retreated to Tucson
- Swilling warned Hunter of advancing Union force, causing Hunter to set out pickets at strategic locations
- Swilling takes Union prisoners to Mesilla
- One of the picket forces encountered Union troops April 15, 1862, the Battle of Picacho Pass
- May 14: Hunter retreats to Mesilla

# Jack Swilling: Union Scout

- June 1862: Jack refused to “requisition” livestock from former neighbors at Pinos Altos, is charged with misconduct
- Jack deserts the Confederate Army
- September 1862: Jack serves the California Column as a paid civilian scout
- Jack served as a scout and courier for the Union Army during the capture of Mesilla, in the Rio Grande valley, and in anti-Apache efforts after the Confederates were driven to Texas

# Jack Swilling: Pioneer

- In April 1863, Jack left the army service and moved west to follow up on his discovery of gold in the Bradshaw Mountains
- Jack led Joseph Walker and his group to just south of present Prescott, where the Pioneer Mining District was founded May 31, 1863, establishing the first laws in the area
- Jack, Abraham Peeples, and Paulino Weaver discovered gold at Rich Hill between Prescott and Wickenburg a few months later, reaping almost \$500,000

# Jack Swilling: Business Man

- Jack moved to Tucson and opened a grist mill with Charles T. Hayden
- Tiring of Tucson, he moved back to Yavapai County and ran gold mining operations and a farm. He was also the mail contractor between Prescott and the Pima Villages. Noticed the old canal system in the Salt River Valley
- April 11, 1864, Jack married Trinidad Mejia Escalante in Tucson. They had 7 children and adopted 2 Apache orphans
- 1865: Jack starts selling his claims to gold mines

# Jack Swilling: Founder

- November 16, 1867, Jack founded the Swilling Irrigation and Canal Company at Wickenburg, intending to use the ancient canals along the Salt River Valley
- In 1868, the first crops of wheat, barley, and corn were harvested from Jack's farms. His success attracted many others to the area, and his company provided access to water
- Original settlement moved west 3 miles and became known as Phoenix

# Jack Swilling: Restless

- 1868-70, Jack served as Phoenix's first postmaster and first justice of the peace
- Jack continued various irrigation canals through 1873
- Once the town center moved west, Jack lost interest in the town and moved his family to Gillett, south of Black Canyon City, where he mined, farmed, and ranched
- Jack drank more, and was boastful and fanciful when drunk, claiming many actions that he had not done.

# Jack Swilling

- Spring 1878, Jack and two friends went to recover the body of Jacob Snively, who had been killed by Apaches, and give him a proper burial in Gillett
- While they were on the trip, 3 hooded men robbed a stage coach near Wickenburg
- Jack, while drunk, boasted of pulling off the heist, and was arrested (he was not actually involved)
- Jack was taken to Yuma to face charges

# Jack Swilling

- While waiting for his hearing, Jack died in the Yuma prison August 12, 1878 and was buried in an unmarked grave, age 48.

