

Fascinating and Fun Gilbert Facts

Homesteaders were the first people to claim land where the town of Gilbert began. In the middle 1800's the U.S Government was giving away free 10 acres of land to pioneers who would move to new places in the west and live on the land for 5 years. Those pioneers were called "homesteaders".

Original Homesteads!



How did Gilbert get its name?

William "Bobby" Gilbert was one of the first homesteaders in Gilbert, AZ. He began his homestead in 1898. He sold some of his land to the Arizona Eastern Railway in 1902 to build part of their railroad, they also built a depot (a train stop station) on his land and called it Gilbert Station. The town that grew near that station became known as Gilbert, Arizona.

What was Gilbert's claim to fame?

In 1918 Gilbert was known as the "Alfalfa Hay Capital of the World". Alfalfa hay was used to feed cows and horses and grows extremely fast in the good soil and good weather in Arizona. Alfalfa grows so fast here that farmers could cut their fields of alfalfa 8-11 times in one year. They were shipping the alfalfa hay bales on the railroad to feed the horses of the U.S. Army during World War I.



Why was the railroad so important?



The little town of Gilbert began to grow as more people moved here and started businesses. First was Ayer's General Store, then a creamery (to process the milk from the cows), a blacksmith, a post office, a lumber yard, and other businesses soon followed. In 1920 legal papers were filed with the county government and Gilbert became an official town in Arizona – one square mile in area. The first town mayor was Everett R. Wilber.

When did Gilbert become an "official" town?



The railroad was built across homesteader's lands in 1903. The station (depot) was built on Bobby Gilbert's homestead. Gilbert farmers could then ship their crops they grew here (like alfalfa and cotton) and sell them to people in other areas in the United States. They could also get other needed supplies from other parts of America.

Paved Roads – A big event!



Why does Gilbert Have a water tower?

In the early 1900's most towns had water towers to store water that was pumped from wells under the ground. When water is high off the ground it creates more pressure as gravity helps it flow faster through pipes and hoses. This is important for things like putting out fires and getting water to your faucet quickly. In modern water plants there are now huge pumps that push the water through the pipes to homes and other building. Today Gilbert's water tower is not a working water storage tower, but it is a symbol of Gilbert History.



Before 1957 all but one of the roads in the little town of Gilbert were made of dirt. Dirt roads do not stay level, they are dusty whenever a car travels on them, and muddy when it rains. Gilbert Rd. was the first town street to be paved in the early 1920's. However, the rest of Gilbert had only dirt roads until 1957, more that 30 years after cars were the usual mode of transportation! In 1971 the first stop light (and then ONLY) stop light in Gilbert was at the intersection of Gilbert and Elliot Road. (You can see that very stoplight at HDSOUTH).