

John "Jack" Swilling

([April 1, 1830](#) – [August 12, 1878](#))

Jack Swilling was one of the original founders of the city of [Phoenix, Arizona](#). He had a dual reputation for kindness and a rough, tough side. Biographers have indicated he may have killed a dozen or more men, once shooting and killing a man in [Wickenburg, Arizona](#) in self-defense, then scalping him. He was also said to be addicted to morphine and alcohol.

Born in North Carolina, he moved to the New Mexico and Arizona Territories around the 1850s, pursuing prospecting and mining for newly discovered gold. By 1860, with the onset of the Civil War, he joined the Arizona Guards - then a part of the newly formed Confederacy - with the primary intent of helping the Guard protect settlers from Apache raiders. By 1862, however, he left the confederacy for the Union Army. According to research by Swilling historian Al Bates (thenaturalamerican.com), "His service with the Confederacy ended when he refused to forage livestock from friends and neighbors in the Pinos Altos vicinity. Rather than report for disciplinary action, he and several others deserted from the CSA. By then the Confederate Army in the West was on the run from the California Column lead by General Carleton. Carleton soon hired Jack as a civilian dispatch rider, most likely on the recommendation of a Union officer who recently had been Jack's prisoner."

He arrived in Phoenix from [Prescott, Arizona](#), with friend and colleague [Darrell Duppa](#) in [1867](#). In his travels as a rider and scout for the Union, he had been fascinated with the ancient Hohokam ruins and artifacts, especially the extensive network of canals the ancient Indians had dug to irrigate their fields. His concept was that the old canals could be re-built for modern farmers, and that the soil of the valley could support highly productive farms. Within a very short time, the Swilling and Duppa team had water flowing in a canal.

By [January 1, 1868](#), Swilling's home area, where up to fifty more pioneer homes had been built by this time, was known as Pumpkinville - so named for the impressive growth of pumpkins Jack had earlier planted along the canals. Darrell Duppa suggested the name [Phoenix](#)--for much like the mythical [Phoenix](#) rising from its ashes, a new civilization would soon rise from the ashes of an old.

Swilling died in jail of natural causes while awaiting trial for a stagecoach robbery he did not commit.

Data from: The Sharlot Hall Museum of Arizona; The Salt River Project History Museum of Arizona; http://www.thenaturalamerican.com/jack_swilling.htm