Safford’s Changing Streets Over the Years

Not many are alive today who still live in these parts who can remember when 8th Avenue in Safford went by a different name. I would guess that none would remember the first names that our streets were called.

In 1874-75 when the first business in Safford was Josh Bailey’s general store, saloon and place of safety from the Apache renegades, Bailey was probably involved in naming the two or three streets in town. By 1880, a small grid of dirt streets had been laid out around the mostly empty Safford blocks. According to early newspaper articles, names such as Fort, Station and Alameda as well as Main, Safford and Graham were chosen as more streets came into being. Those names continued unchanged until 1900 when the Safford town council decided to change all the names and continuously printed an article in the newspaper telling residents and newcomers the new names.

The new avenues started with I Avenue which is now 8th Avenue, with each avenue to the east going up the alphabet. Thus, our current 5th Avenue became L Avenue and Central became K Avenue. The streets changed as well with our current Main street becoming 10th Street and growing in number as they headed south with current 8th Street becoming 12th Street. These designations of routes in Safford continued until another vote of the town council on 21 August 1916.

In 1916, it was decided to adopt a system much like Pima now has. The names of Main Street and Central Avenue were adopted and this intersection became ground zero in the street designation. This way our current 5th Avenue became 1st Street West and current 8th Street became 2nd Street South.

It was on Oct 19, 1925, when our current system of streets and avenues were named according to the newspaper article.

All during this early time in Safford, improvements were being made along the different streets. The improvements at first were due to the business owners themselves. Wooden sidewalks were installed at first and then cement sidewalks were paid for by the business owners in sections in front of their stores. The city provided a horse drawn water tanker to sprinkle the dirt streets and keep the dust to a minimum. The city finally began to provide paved streets and then street lights as electricity became available. Safford improved as the people and times demanded.

Attached are two documents of interest concerning how Safford street names evolved: (1) Safford Streets, 1885 – 1895; and (2) A picture of a street with very little improvements.
Early Safford Street: very little improvements