SNOWDRIFT
ART SPACE

Snowdrift Art Space: One Hundred Years of History

The Babbitt Brothers in Winslow, Arizona

Introduction

Soon after the American Civil War ended in 1865, the federal government resumed industrial development in the West. In 1866, President Andrew Johnson chartered the Atlantic & Pacific Railroad (A&P) to build a transcontinental line along the 35th parallel. The first trains arrived in the new towns of Winslow in December 1881 and Flagstaff in August 1882. In 1897, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad (Santa Fe) bought the A&P's Western Division, which ran from Albuquerque to Needles, California, and transferred division headquarters from Gallup to Winslow. The subsequent influx of employees, as well as Winslow's location as a livestock, trade goods, and lumber shipping point, transformed the boomtown into a major city along the principal rail line to the West Coast.

As Winslow grew, businesses typical of a turn-of-the-century Western town lined the main artery that ran along the tracks. Railroad Avenue boasted mercantile stores, restaurants, hotels, and saloons. In 1898, the Babbitts bought out Frasier-Dagg Mercantile Company and opened their first branch store in Winslow on Railroad Avenue.

The Babbitt Brothers of Flagstaff, Arizona

In 1886, Flagstaff saw the arrival of four brothers from Cincinnati, Ohio: David, William, George, and Charles (C.J.). The Babbitts operated one of the most influential and respected corporations in Northern Arizona for over a century. Their diverse operations included cattle and sheep ranching, lumber, manufacturing, real estate, finance, and Indian trading, but their greatest influence on Northern Arizona was in general merchandise.

David decided to diversify their ranching business and opened a hardware and lumber store in Flagstaff in 1887. He gradually added other departments, many both wholesale and retail: meat, groceries, vegetables, dry goods, domestics, shoes, men's and women's ready-to-wear, drugs, and Native American blankets and jewelry. The Flagstaff store thrived and led to branches in Winslow, Williams, Ash Fork, Holbrook, Kingman, Oatman, the Grand Canyon, and Page. The Babbitt's mercantile operations dominated their regional competition through volume purchasing and selling, wide-ranging inventory, modern merchandising, effective advertising, and sales on credit.

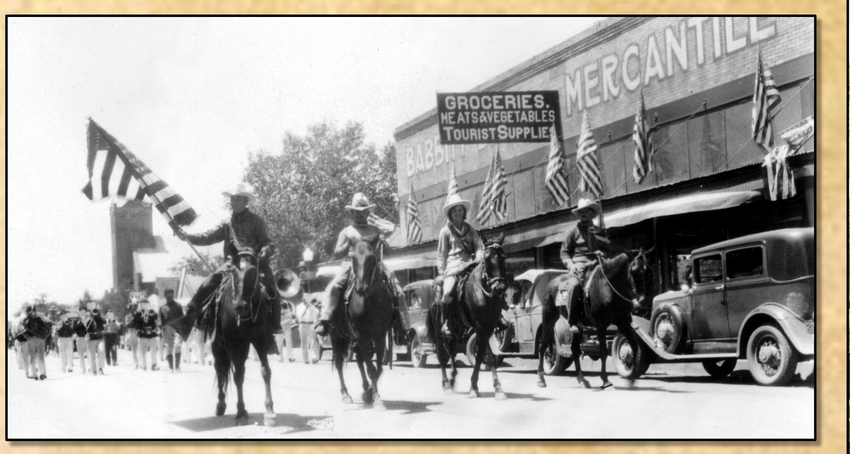
Mercantiles were often located in long, narrow buildings with high ceilings, and not an inch of space was wasted. Seen here in 1902, Babbitt Brothers Mercantile Company advertised Stetson hats, suits, shoes, and dry goods. (Courtesy of Dona Bruchman Harris)

Babbitts Moves to Second Street

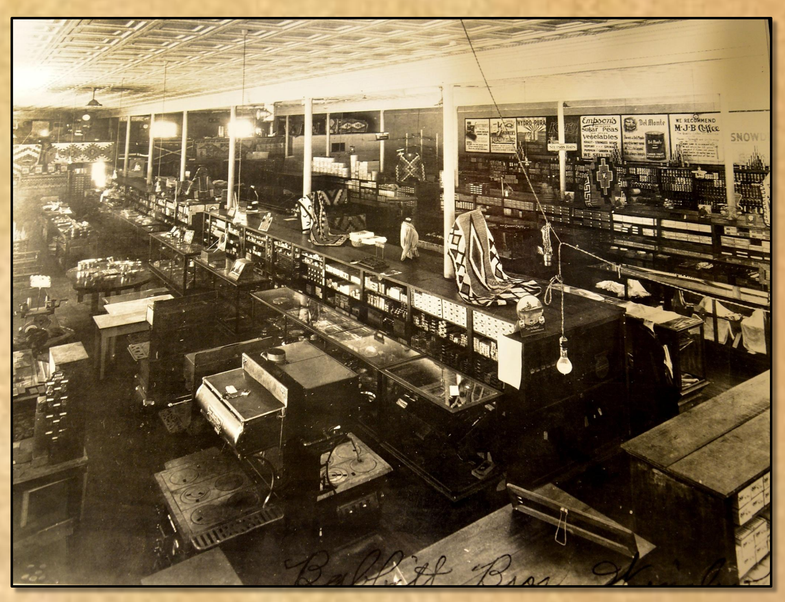
The Babbitt Brothers Trading Company reorganized as a corporation in 1918. Now at the height of their success, the Babbitts owned cattle and sheep operations on 3.5 million acres in three states, vast land holdings, the largest retail stores in Northern Arizona, a dozen trading posts, lumber yards, a cotton mill, an ice plant, a packing house, auto dealerships, and other ventures across the region. Their influence on Northern Arizona's developing economy extended to its residents, who enjoyed sales on credit, a wide range of commodities at reasonable prices, and good working conditions for hundreds of employees.

By the time Arizona became the 48th state in 1912, Winslow had a population nearing 4,000 and was referred to as "the metropolis of Northern Arizona." The city's center shifted north from First Street (formerly Railroad Avenue) to Second, which became part of the transcontinental National Old Trails Highway by 1920. Babbitt Brothers Mercantile moved to the new Hubbard Building (now Snowdrift Art Space) on Second Street in 1914. The largest single building in Winslow to date was typical of local commercial architecture prior to World War I: masonry construction, a slightly pitched roof with parapets, a boxy shape that maximized space and minimized construction costs, and an open first floor storefront to attract customers.

A 1920s vintage postcard of Babbitt Brothers Mercantile on Second Street



A Fourth of July parade passed in front of the Second Street building in the 1920s.



The interior of Babbitt Brothers Mercantile in the 1920s

Acknowledgments

Snowdrift Art Space: One Hundred Years of History was developed for Snowdrift Art Space's Centennial Celebration by Old Trails Museum Director Ann-Mary Lutzick. La Posada Hotel General Manager Daniel Lutzick constructed the exhibit kiosks, and Northern Arizona Signs printed the exhibit panels. Sources included *The Winslow Mail*, *Winslow* by Ann-Mary Lutzick, *The House of Babbitt* by Abdorrahim Akbarzadeh (1992); *The Babbitt Brothers Trading Company* by John G. Babbitt (1967); *The Brothers Five* by Dean Smith (1989); and *History of the Babbitt Brothers Trading Company* by Frank J. Turley (1939). Unless otherwise noted, all images and interviews are from the Old Trails Museum Collection or Snowdrift Art Space (Panel 3). *Snowdrift Art Space: One Hundred Years of History* was made possible in part by the Winslow Arts Trust (WAT), with additional funding provided by the Old Trails Museum/Winslow Historical Society and Snowdrift owners Daniel and Ann-Mary Lutzick. WAT is a nonprofit organization that, along with affiliates Snowdrift Art Space and El Gran Art Garage, is dedicated to bringing the history and culture of the Historic Route 66 corridor and the Winslow area to the general public.

WINSLOW ARTS TRUST

Old Trails Museum