THE HUBBELL BUILDING IN TRANSITION

When Lorenzo Jr. died in 1942, brother Roman and his wife, Dorothy, moved to Winslow and managed the family businesses. In 1944, they made updates to the building’s display area that included a walk-in vault in the northwest corner for storing valuable jewelry and pawn. Winslow’s growth slowed after World War II when the Santa Fe streamlined operations and expanded its workforce elsewhere. The Hubbell empire also stalled – Roman and Dorothy declared bankruptcy in 1952 and sold all of the family holdings except for the trading post and homestead at Ganado.

Phoenix real estate developer Kyle Bales purchased the building and most of the inventory from the Hubbells, including the “World’s Largest Navajo Rug,” from 1952 to 1972. Bales and daughter Patricia Bales Kinsolving operated it as the Hubbell Trading Post, which was part of the vibrant tourist trade along US Route 66 (below, circa 1950s).

Bales and Kinsolving also continued to travel the oversized rug to special events around the country, including the Los Angeles County Fair (1951), the New York World’s Fair (1964-1965), the Heard Museum (1965-1966), the Arizona State Fair (c.1969 and c.1970), and at the Navajo Nation Fair in Winslow Rock (1960s and early 1970s).

Bales died in the late 1970s, several years after they had closed the Hubbell Trading Post. Patricia Bales Smith (now remarried) deeded the building to the Arizona Historical Society in 1986. In 1987, the historical society temporarily rented the building to Arizona State Parks to use as the Homolovi State Ruins Park offices while new park facilities were under construction.

In October 1979, Interstate 40 bypassed Winslow’s section of Route 66 and decimated the city’s vibrant downtown businesses. But over time, more and more travelers pulled off the interstate to explore the small towns and experience the charm and authenticity of a bygone era. Old Route 66 received a historic highway designation in 1987. The City of Winslow planned to make the Hubbell building the west anchor of downtown revitalization. So the city acquired the grounds surrounding the building from the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad in 1997 and the building itself from the Arizona Historical Society in 1998. In 2002, the City of Winslow submitted a successful nomination to have the Hubbell Trading Post and Warehouse listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination’s narrative provided a comprehensive description of the building’s historical significance: it is the only intact Hubbell trading post, warehouse, and shipping center on the Santa Fe line (the adobe warehouse in Gallup was demolished); the building has a high degree of structural integrity, including the interior spaces and original equipment; the center was an integral part of the largest trading post empire in the Southwest; and the center was culturally significant in “its role as a commerce link between cultures, in that it provided space for contact between Navajos and Anglos for the exchange and transportation of essential goods.”

As in many small towns, the Chamber of Commerce and the Visitor’s Center are combined. Chamber CEO Bob Hall and Chamber Assistant Angela Gonzales Moser promote the many tourist attractions in the area, which are an important component of Winslow’s economic life. Bob and Angela are also directly responsible for hosting multiple local special events: Good Morning Winslow (monthly), Taste of Winslow (June), Winslow Fourth of July Fireworks, Chamber Annual Community BBQ (August), Winslow Christmas Parade (November), and the Festival of the Trees (December), which is held in the north half of the building. This “Community Space” is available to the public for events and meetings throughout the year, making it an invaluable resource for Winslow residents.

The Chamber contributes financially to multiple other events, and it is also a partner in hosting the Mid-Summer’s Day in Winslow (August), Standin’ on the Corner Festival (September), the High Desert Fly-In (September), and the Just Cruisin’ Car Club Show (October).

THE WORLD’S LARGEST NAVAJO RUG: A HOMECOMING

In 2012, the owners of La Posada Hotel – Allan Affeldt and his wife, artist Tina Mion – purchased the “World’s Largest Navajo Rug” from Patricia Bales Smith’s family, who had it in storage in Flagstaff. When Affeldt learned that Emma Joe was still alive and wanted to see the rug one last time, he invited Emma and her relatives to a private viewing in the depot. Ninety-four years old and blind, “Emma got up out of her wheelchair, and with her daughters and grandkids, walked the Life pattern through the rug. It was just a beautiful thing, with Navajo chanting throughout, and then she died a couple months later,” said Affeldt.

Affeldt added, “We wanted the rug to come back to Winslow because we thought it would be a great part of the story of the Hubbells and Navajo weaving in the Southwest.” (Arizona Daily Sun, July 26, 2015) He plans to display it in a new museum located in the original Santa Fe depot designed by La Posada architect Mary E.J. Colter.

The Winslow Visitor’s Center: A Hubbell Trading Post History