Winslow’s First Workers and Residents

The A&P recruited US citizens, European immigrants, Mexican nationals, and Navajos—preferably with some railroad experience—to move to Winslow and help build the new line. The railroad designated Winslow as a major division point, in part because nearby Clear Creek supplied water for permanent staff, steam engines, and rail yards. Workers soon built a pump house, roundhouse, machine and blacksmith shops, stockyards, and depot.

Most early residents lived in railroad tie shacks or tent “houses” like this one on Aspinwall Street. It was made of canvas over wood floors, with flaps that let the breezes in.

Winslow’s Early Businesses

The Navajo County Board of Supervisors granted incorporation to Winslow in January 1900, and the first city elections were held in March. Winslow’s population had grown to an ethnically diverse mix of 900 or so railroaders, entrepreneurs, and cowboys. Businesses typical of a turn-of-the-century Western town lined Railroad Avenue: mercantile stores, restaurants, hotels, and saloons (below). Winslow was an exciting place to be as the Old West entered the 20th century.

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 1912-14 city council renamed Railroad Avenue as First Street, and the city’s business center shifted north to Second Street.

Considered Winslow’s first businessman, Frederick C. Demarest arrived by team and wagon in 1880. He erected tent “hotel rooms” as worker housing next to the first Clear Creek dam, and established Sunset Dairy on the Brigham City site in 1905 (behind him). LaPrade talked most of his siblings into joining him in Winslow. They either worked for the railroad or as shopkeepers. Nephew Jim LaPrade, Jr. states, “Dad arrived when the mail was still thrown on a saloon bar and men had to sort through it to find their own.” Janice Blum interview for the Winslow Mail, 1980.

Like many early residents of Mexican descent, Santiago and Emma Baca came from New Mexico Territory in the 1880s. In 1903, daughter Trinidad Baca Leyva (with cat) and her family stand outside their home and grocery store in Coopertown, or Palomas, located south of the tracks.

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