Old Trails Museum

Journeys To Winslow

The Railroads Build a Town: Early Days

In 1863, the United States government created the Arizona Territory from land it acquired during the Mexican-American War and the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. Its northern region remained isolated and undeveloped until the railroad arrived. Soon after the Civil War ended in 1865, President Andrew Johnson chartered the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad to build a transcontinental line along the 35th parallel. A&P track gangs laid out the townsite in late 1880, and the first train arrived one year later. The new town was named in honor of railroad executive Edward F. Winslow.

The A&P established a Western Division that ran from south of Albuquerque, New Mexico, to Needles, California. This 1882 map illustrates the Third Operating Division from Winslow to Williams in Arizona Territory. (Courtesy of the David Rumsey Collection)

Sunset Crossing-East of Winslow by Joseph Cruz Rodriguez shows early migrants taking advantage of the underlying bedrock to cross the Little Colorado River. The crossing was near where Interstate 10 now crosses the river.

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.

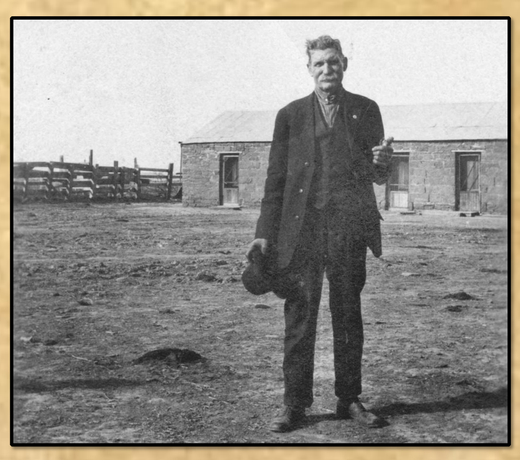
Left: In the 1880s, A&P section crews like this one slowly worked their way across northern Arizona Territory. Surveyors worked ahead of section crews, which included graders, "gandy dancers" that laid track, and "pikers" that pounded spikes through wooden ties. Right: These workers pause for a photograph in Winslow's rail yards in 1892.

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

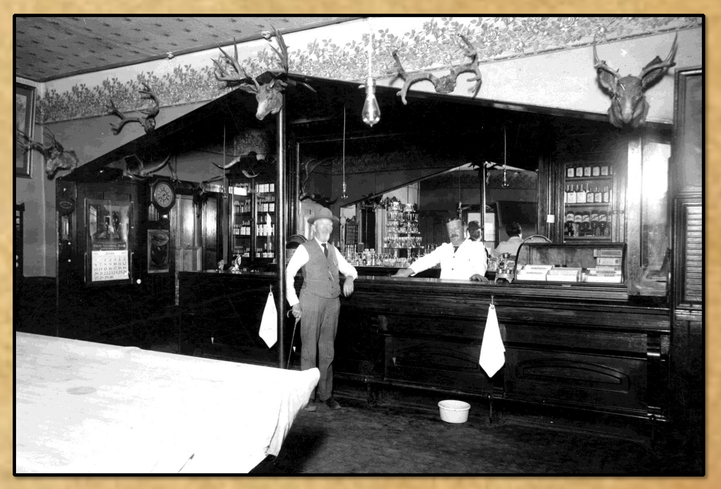
The Navajo County Board of Supervisors granted incorporation to Winslow in January 1900, and the first city elections were held in March. Winslow's population had grown to an ethnically diverse mix of 900 or so railroaders, entrepreneurs, and cowboys. Businesses typical of a turn-of-the-century Western 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.

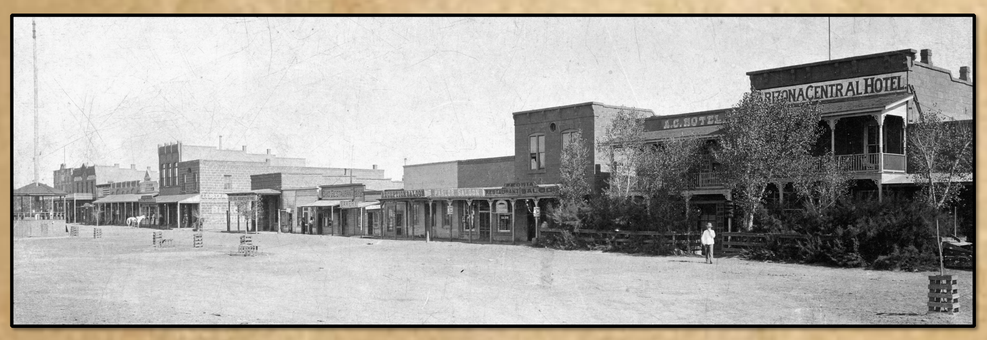


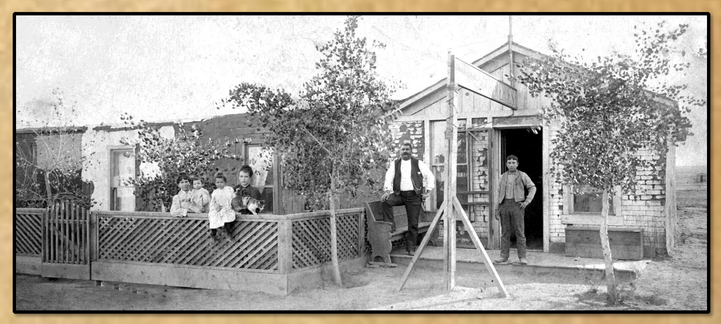
Fernando Thornton "F.T." LaPrade arrived from Georgia on horseback in 1886. He opened a blacksmith shop, helped build the first Clear Creek dam, and established Sunset Dairy on the Brigham City site in 1905 (behind him). LaPrade talked most of his siblings into joining him in Winslow. They either worked for the railroad or as shopkeepers. Nephew Jim LaPrade, Jr stated:

"Dad arrived when the mail was still thrown on a saloon bar and men had to sort through it to find their own." Janice Henling interview for the *Winslow Mail*, 1980



Considered Winslow's first businessman, Frederick C. Demarest arrived by team and wagon in 1880. He erected tent "hotel rooms" as worker housing along Railroad Avenue. In 1885, Demarest (left) opened the Arizona Central Hotel, a two-story building with a restaurant and saloon.





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

Acknowledgments: This printing of the Old Trails Museum's *Journeys to Winslow* exhibit was funded by Tess and Lawrence Kenna. The exhibit was originally developed by OTM Director Ann-Mary Lutzick for the Arizona tour of Museum on Main Street's *Journey Stories* exhibit, a collaboration between the Smithsonian Institution and Arizona Humanities. Unless noted, all images and interviews are from the Old Trails Museum Collection. For more Winslow history, visit the Old Trails Museum (across from the Standin' on the Corner Park) or www.oldtrailsmuseum.org.