The Railroads Build a Town: Early Industry

Winslow’s location as a livestock, trade goods, and lumber shipping point contributed to its growth and stability in the first half of the 20th century. The Santa Fe Railway shipped goods to markets across the country, which in turn made the railroad more successful. Consumers on both coasts enjoyed access to Arizona’s natural and cultural resources. In Winslow, these industries diversified the economic base as well as the population.

Ranches and Ranchers

The railroad shipped cattle to northern Arizona Territory in the 1870s and 1880s as the population and demand for food increased. By the 1890s, overstocking, overgrazing, and drought decimated the area’s sheep and cattle populations. Arizona’s ranching industry struggled to survive and was helped by the railroad’s link to Midwestern and California markets. Although the sheep industry did not fare as well, the area’s cattle industry survives today in part because of careful stewardship of both land and animals.

Trading Posts and Traders

Trading posts played a unique role in the economy of the American West from the 1860s through the 1970s. Navajo people acquired a taste for some new household staples during their confinement at Bosque Redondo, so traders established permanent businesses and exchanged those staples for Navajo wool, blankets, jewelry, and livestock. By 1930, there were over 150 trading posts on or near Navajo lands that fulfilled critical commercial and social functions. Traders were usually Anglo and often learned the language, promoted Native arts, mediated between Native peoples and the outside world, and played a critical role in household economies by offering credit and pawn. Starting in the 1880s, over a dozen families with ties to Winslow worked at nearly thirty locations throughout the region, establishing unique relationships with Navajo and Hopi artists and families.

The Lumber Industry

Logging in northeastern Arizona thrived because of the Ponderosa pine to the south and the cost-effective shipping of finished lumber on the Santa Fe and Route 66. Winslow’s logging and mill employees worked for the Duke City Lumber Company, Nagel Lumber & Timber Company, or Ramsey Lumber Company. Lumber companies employed many Mexican Americans as well as African Americans who emigrated from the Deep South.

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