The Santa Fe Railway

Cyrus K. Holliday founded the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway, better known as the Santa Fe, in 1859. The Santa Fe bought the Atlantic and Pacific’s Western Division in 1897 and transferred the division headquarters from Gallup to Winslow. The influx of infrastructure and employees transformed the railroad boomtown into a major city along the principal rail line to the West Coast. Railroading dominated the lives of most residents during the first half of the 20th century.

Harvey Houses and Harvey Girls

Starting in 1876, entrepreneur Fred Harvey opened a series of dining houses along the Santa Fe line in cooperation with the railroad. Considered America’s first restaurant chain, the family-run “Fred Harvey” company operated through the 1960s. Harvey Girls had to work hard, adhere to strict rules, and remain unmarried during their term of service. Like tens of thousands throughout the West, many of Winslow’s Harvey Girls eventually married local men and settled in town.

La Posada Hotel

After 1900, both the Santa Fe and Fred Harvey began promoting travel to the Southwest. The Fred Harvey company promoted Southwestern history and cultures as a way to encourage tourism and sell Native-made goods. Railroad travelers experienced the Southwest through Fred Harvey’s grand hotels, retail sales of Native American arts and crafts, and the Harveycar Detours. La Posada, Fred Harvey’s last grand hotel and company architect Mary Colter’s masterpiece, opened north of the tracks in 1930. Colter designed La Posada as if it had been the grand hacienda of a wealthy Spanish don, housing rare furnishings in an elegant atmosphere.

The Santa Fe Indian Band

The company-sponsored Santa Fe Indian Band, seen here at La Posada in 1948, consisted of Navajo, Hopi, and Laguna employees and their family members. The Santa Fe employed Laguna men in exchange for crossing their Pueblo lands in New Mexico. Laguna families lived in converted boxcars on Santa Fe property. Dressed in velvetean shirts and Native jewelry, the band logged thousands of rail miles performing at Arizona State Fairs, Gallup Intertribal Indian Ceremonials, the Union Station Opening Day Parade in Los Angeles in 1939, and President Eisenhower’s inauguration parade in Washington, DC, in 1953. They also played local Winslow Christmas Parades and weekly concerts in the La Posada band shell.

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