The Santa Fe Railway

In 1897, the Santa Fe bought the Atlantic and Pacific’s Western Division, which ran from Albuquerque, New Mexico, to Needles, California. They soon transferred division headquarters from Gallup, New Mexico, to Winslow. The subsequent influx of employees transformed the boomtown into a major city along the principal rail line to the West Coast. The Santa Fe dominated Winslow’s growth and workforce from the 1890s through the 1920s, when most freight and travelers crossed the country by rail.

Harvey Houses and Harvey Girls

Entrepreneur Fred Harvey established fine-dining facilities along the Santa Fe line that evolved into America’s first restaurant chain. Harvey opened Winslow’s first Harvey House in 1887. “Harvey Girl” waitresses from the East Coast and Midwest soon followed. Harvey Girls had to be well-mannered, neat in appearance, and remain unmarried during their terms 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 companies began promoting travel to the Southwest. “Fred Harvey,” as the company was known, promoted Southwestern history and cultures as a way to encourage tourism and sell Native-made goods. Railway travelers experienced the Southwest through Fred Harvey’s grand hotels, retail sales of Native American arts and crafts, and the Harveycar Indian Detours. Winslow’s proximity to Meteor Crater, Hopi and Navajo lands, and the Petrified Forest National Monument made it an ideal tourism destination. La Posada, Fred Harvey’s last grand hotel and architect Mary Colter’s masterpiece, opened north of the tracks in 1930.

The Santa Fe All-Indian Band

Seen on the right at La Posada in 1948, the company-sponsored Santa Fe All-Indian Band consisted of Navajo, Hopi, and Laguna railroad employees and their family members. The band logged thousands of rail miles playing around the country from 1923 to 1964. They performed at Arizona State Fairs, gubernatorial inaugurations, and President Eisenhower’s inaugural parade in 1953.