Old Trails Museum

Journeys To Winslow

Winslow Today: Commerce and Services

The Santa Fe and BNSF Railways

After World War II ended, the Santa Fe considered expanding Winslow's diesel shops. But town leaders resisted growth, so the railroad moved the shops to Barstow, California. Meanwhile, technological advances continued to reduce jobs throughout the industry. Also facing competition from the airlines, the Santa Fe shed its less-profitable passenger service and focused on hauling freight. Though Congress authorized Amtrak to provide national passenger service in 1971, the railroads are still critical to hauling freight around the nation. In 1995, the Santa Fe merged with the Burlington Northern Railroad. Though divisional headquarters were transferred to Belen, New Mexico, in 2001, the BNSF Railway is one of the largest employers in Winslow.

A BNSF train led by six locomotives approaches Winslow from the west, with the San Francisco Peaks in the background and Interstate 40 on the right. (Reprinted with permission of BNSF Railway Company)

Bill Shumway worked for both the Santa Fe and BNSF Railways. (Photo courtesy of Bill Shumway) Shumway explained why he worked for the railroads from 1970 until he retired in 2010:

"There was a lot to enjoy. I was pretty lucky in that I never did get to where it became boring to me. One thing about is that you hardly ever worked with the same person . . . for the most part, everybody out there got along . . . you might not work with somebody for three or four months and you get to catch up on what they've been doing . . . the scenery was always fun, and just the idea of going for an afternoon train-ride was always exciting to me . . ."

Susan Kislingbury comes from a long line of railroaders. She went to work for the Santa Fe in 1969 when she was 18 years old. Seen here on the train platform behind La Posada in 2010, Kislingbury reflected on her career with the railroad:

"I worked Winslow to San Francisco, Los Angeles, Fresno, Bakersfield, Barstow . . . When I went to work on the railroad, we still had three stations that used Morse code: Clarksdale, Parker and Wickenburg . . . I hired out as a conductor in February of '95. I was going to be 45 years old. But it's the best thing that ever happened to me. But it was tough . . . and then I became an engineer in September of 1998." Mary Tolan interview, 2009

The Winslow-Lindbergh Regional Airport

TWA resumed commercial flights after World War II and became Trans World Airways in 1950. It was joined by Frontier Airlines as a Winslow carrier, but both discontinued service in the 1980s due to high costs and lack of passengers. The city-owned airport remains active for private aviation, medical transport helicopters, and as a fire suppression base for the US Forest Service. In a nod to its historical significance, it was renamed the Winslow-Lindbergh Regional Airport in 1998.

Acting postmaster Mary G. Ferguson hands a bag of airmail to Mayor Floyd C. Whipple in the mid-1950s (left). A n envelope from Winslow's 1930 airmail service is seen above.

Based in Flagstaff, Wiseman Aviation is the private company that operates the Winslow-Lindbergh Regional Airport. Owner Orville Wiseman described how he has come to appreciate the airport's unique history:

". . . you just start talking to people, I did a little reading about it, used some aviation historians that talked some about it . . . for many years we played music from the 1940s (in the terminal) and they do those re-broadcasts of news events of the time, and it just at times would make my hair stand on end because you realize, wow, this place was here, kind of in the middle of all that. The Winslow Airport was probably the busiest airport in the Southwest back in the 1940s or so, all the airmail for Northern Arizona went through there . . . it's probably the oldest continuous service passenger terminal in the world at this point . . . that's a pretty neat little piece of history right there."

A 1937 Lockheed 12A "Electra Junior" is parked in front of Winslow's historic terminal, which Wiseman Aviation has restored to its original style. This vintage plane is owned by Ruth Richter Holden, daughter of one of TWA's founders. (Photo courtesy of Wiseman Aviation)

Winslow as Border Town

Hopi and Navajo people have continually migrated between their tribal lands and Winslow for trade, employment, education, public services, and entertainment. Nonnative Winslow residents have also migrated to Hopi and Navajo communities while working as traders, teachers, and medical workers.

Winslow hosted Indian Day for many years, seen here in 1955. That year it was attended by almost 4,000 Hopis and Navajos on the west grounds of La Posada Hotel. The Winslow Women's Club served hot dogs and soda pop, and Santa Claus handed out toys to over 2,000 children. Many Route 66 travelers also stopped to enjoy the bands, dancers, and speakers.

In 1996, Patricia Egan poses with her second-grade students at Dilkon School, 40 miles northeast of Winslow. She remembered leaving Chicago in 1989 at age 55 to start a new career:

"I thought, how many people of this age have a whole other world opening up to them . . . It starts in New Mexico, and you see the landscape change and you can hardly concentrate on driving . . . It was tremendously exciting to pull off the interstate and move on up into the reservation and find the school, and find my apartment, and get going . . . I think it was one of the most satisfying experiences of my life . . . something about being in a totally new setting where you are the minority . . . And you're given this great trust . . . 'I have all this influence over these beautiful little kids.' I felt like everything in my life leading up to that time prepared me for that, and I felt a real kinship with the people, especially the grandparents, many of whom were taking care of the kids . . . And I felt very honored by that trust."

In 1956, the Bureau of Indian Education opened a Native American dormitory in Winslow named Emmons Hall. Renovated and renamed Winslow Residential Hall in 1990, it houses Hopi, Navajo, and Apache students while they attend Winslow High School.

Sophomore and varsity basketball player Kaelyn Bitsoi (left) described why she was willing to leave her home in Leupp to attend school in Winslow:

". . . it gives me more experience, more time to be social amongst my peers here at the residential hall, getting to know the staff as well, and at the high school it would be the high standards that they have with the accelerated classes, with the AP classes. They're pretty good. I like them. Actually, I love them (laughs)!"

Helene Botone (right), Executive Director of Winslow Residential Hall, reflected on one of the advantages for the students of attending school and boarding in Winslow:

"I see the students as we're all related . . . even though we're miles part, I still know a lot of the families. Some of the kids here I've had when they were little, at a different school district . . . it's like one big, regional community . . . It's a small Native community, and someone is related to someone all the time."