

The Santa Fe Railway and Tourism in New Mexico

Peter White

More than 30 years before New Mexico became a state in 1912, its territorial Bureau of Immigration writers touted the life-giving and healing properties of New Mexico's natural hot springs. The mineral waters combined with the "miracle of sun and air" led "lungers" and "hackers," as tubercular patients were called, to follow the railroads to New Mexico's spas, sanitoriums, hospitals and resorts in the 1880s. The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway had signed a contract in 1878 with Frederick Henry Harvey, who later became known as the "Civilizer of the West," to operate their restaurants, dining cars and hotels.

Fred Harvey, who "introduced America to Americans," had a genius for merchandizing culture. Hotels in the Harvey system, designed by prominent architects like Mary Colter and John

Gaw Meem, were named after Spanish explorers and were calculated to "create the romantic atmosphere of old Spain." Harvey provided flawless service and elegant meals, and he created the Harvey girls — moral, attractive, and intelligent young waitresses who were rigorously trained and strictly chaperoned. He insisted upon dress codes and decorum in all his establishments.

The Harvey organization sold traditional and newly redesigned Indian arts and crafts to tourists. Anthropologists were employed to instruct women guides dressed as Navajos and drivers dressed as cowboys, to conduct the Indian Detours, motorcar adventures "off the beaten path."

The Santa Fe Railway and the Fred Harvey Company reshaped the alien Southwest to make it glow with the antiquity and cultural significance of Egypt, Rome or Greece. They invested traditional art with the craftsmanship of the European Renaissance. And they re-created the heroism of the Santa Fe Trail, with Harvey "cowboys" escorting tourists into the "hinterlands." They packaged and publicized what previously had been local, traditional and often circumspect Native and folk cultures.



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