

Jesse L. Nusbaum—First National Park Service Archeologist

Jesse Logan Nusbaum was the first archeologist hired by the Park Service. He is closely tied to the study of the ancient archeology of the Southwest. He was born in Greeley, Colorado, September 3, 1887, to Edward Moore and Agnes Strickland (Moodie) Nusbaum. His parents and maternal grandparents were members of the original Greeley colony organized by Horace Greeley. Nusbaum attended local public schools in Greeley as well as the Colorado Teachers College there, receiving his B. Pedagogy in 1907.

After graduation, Nusbaum went to New Mexico State Normal in Las Vegas to teach science and manual arts. In the summer of 1907 he began his connection with Mesa Verde as a photographer and archeological assistant to A. V. Kidder. He spent the following summer in a similar fashion.



**Departmental Archeologist
Jesse Nusbaum. NPS photo.**

In June of 1909, Nusbaum became the first employee of the School of American Archeology and Museum of New Mexico in Santa Fe under Dr. Edgar L. Hewett. While there he conducted archeological surveys, investigations, excavations, and ruins stabilization in Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Colorado, and New Mexico including the Pajarito Plateau. Nusbaum's work at the museum again brought him to Mesa Verde for the excavation, repair, and stabilization of Balcony House, an important major project that extended into the winter of 1910. He spent 9 months in Washington, D. C., September 1911 to June 1912, working on exhibits for the Panama-California Exposition to be held in San Diego, California. While in Washington, Nusbaum took advanced courses at night and continued his advanced studies in Colorado during the summer of 1913. His innovations at Mesa Verde and manual arts background stood him in good stead during this supervision of the restoration of the New Mexico Palace of Governors in Santa Fe which was completed in Fall of 1913. In 1913, Nusbaum also worked 3 months in the Maya ruins of Yucatan with Dr. S. G. Morley. During his many expeditions with the museum, Nusbaum also helped restore the mission church at Pecos. He used some of its design in the work of the state art museum, built in 1916-19 under his supervision.

Jesse L. Nusbaum attempted to become an aviator during World War I but instead became an engineer and served in France. He enlisted in May 1918 and was discharged April 1919. From May 1919 to June 1921, he was employed at the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation in New York City. While Nusbaum was working in New York he took part in several southwest expeditions including those at Hawikuh Pueblo and Basketmaker Cave.

In 1921, while still in New York, he was selected by Stephen Mather and Arno Cammerer to become superintendent at Mesa Verde National Park. Director Mather had become disgusted with the conditions that had developed there under a political superintendent. Nusbaum was a very effective superintendent, advancing the development of the park and preserving the

archeological resources. He discontinued grazing, built a museum and developed good interpretive programs, especially ones designed to explain the Antiquities Act. His involvement with the Act led to his designation in 1927 as the lead archeologist and prime enforcer of the Act for the Southwest (while remaining Mesa Verde superintendent).



Photo by George Grant (Harpers Ferry Center Collection, HPC-000179): Nusbaum is seated fourth from right; to his right is NPS Director Horace Albright. Photo is 1929, park rangers at Mesa Verde.

Nusbaum continued this dual capacity until 1930, when he took a leave of absence to organize and direct the Laboratory of Anthropology at Santa Fe, New Mexico. He continued as director of the laboratory until 1935, having earlier returned to the Park Service and resumed his dual duties as Mesa Verde superintendent and Department of the Interior archeologist enforcing the Antiquities Act. Nusbaum continued this dual position for many years. In 1946 he left Mesa Verde and his dual role for Santa Fe. At the National Park Service office there, he took up increased duties as the senior archeologist of the NPS. In this capacity, Nusbaum began one of the first salvage archeology projects when he persuaded El Paso Natural Gas Company to allow archeological excavation along their pipelines. For this, and many other accomplishments, Jesse L. Nusbaum received the Distinguished Service Award from the Department of the Interior in 1954. After a year's extension Nusbaum was forced to retire from the National Park Service at the age of 71 in 1957. However, he continued to do consulting work for many years. He died in Santa Fe in December 1975, at the age of 88.

Nusbaum married Aileen Baehrens O'Bryan on September 21, 1920, but was divorced in 1939. She had one son, Deric. Nusbaum subsequently married Rosemary Lewis Rife, a nurse, on December 11, 1947. His civic associations were as follows: Trustee, Laboratory of Anthropology 1923-38; Member, Advisory Board 1927; State Park Commission of New Mexico 1933-36; Council, American Association of Museums 1932-35; Trustee, Indian Arts Fund 1927; Commission, Old Santa Fe Association 1946-75; Management Board, School of

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American Research, 1947; U.S. International Park and Forest Commission; honorary life member, Museum of New Mexico; Pi Gamma Mu; Fellow, American Association for the Advancement of Science; and Chairman, Social Sciences, Southwest Division 1932-33 as well as Vice President 1935 of the American Anthropological Association; Society for American Archeology; American Planning and Civic Association; 32 Mason. Nusbaum received an honorary D. Sc. from Colorado State in 1946.

In 1923, he and others wrote down their findings in the book *Basketmaker Cave in Kane County, Utah*. Nusbaum was listed in *Who's Who in America* from 1931 until 1960 and was also included in *Directory of American Scholars and American Men of Science*.

Sources of information about Jesse L. Nusbaum

The NPS History Collection, Harpers Ferry Center, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia holds some of Nusbaum's papers. These papers are located in Records Group 5 of the collection. An inventory of these papers is available at <http://www.nps.gov/hfc/products/library/nusbaum.htm>, accessed 1 May 2007>.

The largest part of this collection consists of correspondence, however more of the correspondence is outgoing and the incoming is not necessarily kept with its reply. This correspondence deals with the enforcement of the Antiquities Act, archeological topics, pipeline archeology, park areas especially Mesa Verde National Park, and NPS administrative matters. Most of the correspondence dates from 1946-1958, however copies of and actual correspondence from the 1920's and 1930's are occasionally included. Articles, clippings, periodicals, a few photos, and notes make up the rest of the material. This dates from the 1950's with a few earlier clippings. It is largely due to Nusbaum's efforts that the NPS is so closely tied to Southwest archeology.

The Nusbaum Papers consist mostly of correspondence, 1921-1958, with the bulk 1947-1958. Some of the correspondence is annotated and notes, mostly handwritten, are scattered throughout the folders. The papers also include articles, clippings, periodicals, and a few photos. All the papers are arranged in reverse chronological order, i.e. beginning December 1958 and ending with January 1921. The day books, office files of outgoing correspondence, are probably the most significant. However, the day book for 1950, the year pipeline archeology began, is not in the collection. The "Nut File" is quite interesting and is referred to several times in the correspondence. A folder of 1920's correspondence from Stella M. Leviston who donated funds for an entrance gate and for the Mesa Verde Museum is included in the Mesa Verde material. The folder, "Duties of Archeologist-Nusbaum in General Archeological Work" might be most helpful to those unacquainted with NPS procedures.

It is important to note that these papers only cover the later part of Nusbaum's career from 1946-7 to 1958, when he was stationed at the Region 3 Office in Santa Fe as a consulting archeologist. It does not ordinarily cover his career as Mesa Verde superintendent, his earlier archeological work, his architectural work in Santa Fe, his work with the Santa Fe Laboratory of Anthropology, or all his accomplishments prior to the end of World War II.

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Likewise, Nusbaum's active consulting work after his forced retirement is not ordinarily covered. The Nusbaum Papers therefore give us a glimpse of the height of and the closing of an important archeological career in the NPS while at the same time show the depth and importance of the work involved.

These papers were given by Mrs. Jesse L. Nusbaum (Rosemary). They were generated and collected by her husband during his service as NPS archeologist. They reflect his active correspondence with many university archeologists and other Federal officials on an official and occasionally personal level.

Rosemary Nusbaum also has written two books that include information from notebooks and papers by her husband, Jesse:

The City Different and the Palace: The Palace of the Governors and its Role in Santa Fe History, including Jesse Nusbaum's Restoration Journals. The Sunstone Press, Santa Fe. 1978.

Tierra Dulce: Reminiscences from the Jesse Nusbaum Papers. The Sunstone Press, Santa Fe, New Mexico. 1980.

NPS History Collection, Harpers Ferry Center

2004 Finding Aid, Jesse Nusbaum Papers, 1921-1958.

<<http://www.nps.gov/hfc/products/library/nusbaum.htm>>; accessed 1 May 2007.

[This text was compiled by Francis P. McManamon in 2007, and updated in March, 2009. The biographical text is from the "Finding Aide to the Jesse L. Nusbaum Papers, 1921-1958" in the NPS History Collection. The original text was prepared August 7, 1987 by Ruthanne Heriot. Revised July 6, 2004 by David Nathanson]