

Petrified Forest

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Petrified Forest National Park
Arizona

Painted Desert Inn National Historic Landmark



The Stone Tree House



Built of petrified wood and other native stone, the Painted Desert Inn was the vision of Herbert David Lore. While his family remembers the finished building prior to 1920, Lore registered the inn with the land office in 1924, fulfilling his responsibilities under the Homesteading Act.

For almost twelve years, Lore operated the “Stone Tree House” as a tourist attraction. Visitors could eat meals in the lunchroom, purchase American Indian arts and crafts, and enjoy a cool drink in the downstairs taproom. Six small rooms—cubicles really—were available for two to four dollars per night. Lore also gave two-hour motor car tours through the Black Forest in the Painted Desert below the inn.

The Stone Tree House was an oasis in the Painted Desert, and quite isolated. A shop containing a lighting-plant supplied electricity, as the inn was not connected to electrical lines. Water was hauled from Adamana, ten miles south on the Puerco River.

Unfortunately, Lore had built his inn on a seam of bentonite clay. As the clay swells and shrinks in response to changes in moisture, the foundation of the inn shifts. Early on, the Painted Desert Inn began to show cracks in the walls and water damage.

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)



In the early 1930s, Lore had expressed an interest in selling or exchanging his property “in order that it could be preserved and protected.” He was probably also concerned about the integrity of the building. Petrified Forest National Monument purchased the Painted Desert Inn and four sections of land—four square miles—for \$59,400 in 1936.

In the early 1900s, National Park Service Rustic style architecture—nicknamed *Parkitecture*—arose in the National Park System. This style reflected its connection with the Arts and Crafts movement through buildings that harmonized with their natural environment and regional culture. In the Southwest, Pueblo Revival Style epitomizes this movement, drawing from the Puebloan and Spanish Colonial cultures.

Pueblo Revival Style features stuccoed masonry, thick walls, earth tones, flat roofs, and projecting roof beams (*vigas*). Due to the structural problems of the inn and popularity of Pueblo Revival Style in the 1930s, the Painted Desert Inn was redesigned. Well-known for the Southwestern influence of his designs, National Park Service architect Lyle Bennett created a new look for the inn.

Bennett first started as a ranger in 1927, but moved on to use his degree in fine art to become one of the best and most sought-after architects in the National Park Service. He was considered a master of the Pueblo Revival Style. More of his work can be seen at White Sands and Bandelier

National Monuments and Mesa Verde National Park. The workers that made his plans a reality were the men of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

In the 1930s, men were finding relief from the Depression through the CCC. They built roads, buildings, trails and bridges in many national parks and other federal and state areas, including Petrified Forest National Monument. Throughout the country, the men of the CCC have left their mark on many historic structures.

The CCC used ponderosa pine and aspen poles cut from nearby Arizona forests for roofing beams and smaller crossbeams (*savinos*). Light fixtures were hand-made from punched tin, and wooden tables and chairs were given American Indian designs. The beautiful skylight panels were hand-painted by the CCC workers, designs of prehistoric pottery. Concrete floors were etched and painted with patterns based on Navajo blanket designs.



Open for Business



The fine work of the CCC gave the Painted Desert Inn new life. The inn reopened for business of July 4, 1940, under the management of Edward McGrath for Standard Concessions. The Painted Desert Inn supplied Route 66 travelers with meals, souvenirs, and lodging. It was popular with local residents as a place for meetings and special events.

The good times ended with the beginning of the United States' involvement in World War II. The CCC was disbanded as most of the young men went to war. Travel was curtailed by wartime rationing. The inn closed in October 1942, reopening five years later under new management.

The Fred Harvey Company



The Painted Desert Inn reopened in the late 1940s under the renowned Fred Harvey Company, a business with important ties to Southwest, railroad, and tourism history. Fred Harvey started his company as a partnership with the Santa Fe Railroad in 1876. His facilities for travelers were well known for comfort and quality. The company's architect and interior designer, Mary Elizabeth Jane Colter, arrived in December of 1947. She was already noted for her innovative Southwestern concepts when she came to the Painted Desert Inn. Along with renovations and repair, Colter created a new color scheme. She ordered new plate glass windows placed in strategic walls of the Inn to take advantage of the magnificent view.

Fred Kabotie, a renowned Hopi artist, was hired to paint murals on the dining room and lunchroom walls. The scenes are glimpses into Hopi culture: the Buffalo Dance, a trek to a sacred salt lake, planting time, and Tawa—the Hopi sun god. The sun face was also the logo of the Fred Harvey Company. Kabotie had previously worked for the company at the Grand Canyon and other locations.

Colter was not the only woman that made history with the Fred Harvey Company. Frustrated by rowdy male employees, the Fred Harvey Company recruited women from towns and cities in the East and Midwest to serve customers. These young ladies had to be of good moral character, have at least an eighth grade education, display good manners and be neat and articulate. Their contract stipulated that they could not marry and must abide by all company rules during the term of employment. If hired, the women were given a rail pass to get to their place of employment, a smart uniform, good wages, and room and board. Since their beginning in the 1880s, the Harvey Girls have become American legends. The Harvey Girls of the Painted Desert Inn, from the late 1940s and through the 1950s, still have local ties.

Preserving Our Legacy



Thanks to the concern and support of the public, Painted Desert Inn remains a testament to the historic legacy of Petrified Forest National Park. Although its history is intriguing, the building is difficult to maintain. Cracks form in many of the walls. Window and door frames swell and skew. Water damage and cracks threaten the beautiful Kabotie murals. The seam of bentonite clay beneath the foundation of the inn continues to cause structural problems.

Severe structural damage to the inn forced the Fred Harvey Company to move to the newly completed visitor center complex in 1963. The inn's doors closed while debate over demolition versus preservation went on for many years. The park set aside funds and scheduled demolition of the building for 1975. Due to a public campaign to save the Painted Desert Inn, the building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976, and reopened on a limited basis as the Bicentennial Travel Center. Because of its fine examples of Pueblo Revival Style design by Bennett, historic work by the CCC, touches by Mary Colter, and Kabotie's murals, the Painted Desert Inn became a National Historic Landmark in 1987.



During the most recent work between 2004 and 2006, "modernizing" some of the structural elements in the building will help postpone damage—thirteen "floating" roofs, joint-less pipes in the walls, and re-laid flagstones to help with drainage. Even while bringing the structure into the present, the park is trying to maintain the historical integrity of the building and attempting to present the inn as it was in its heyday during the late 1940s into the 1950s. These rehabilitation projects have continued to preserve the inn for future generations to enjoy, thanks to generous public support.