

**Mesa Verde National Park Historic Furniture  
Research Project  
by Patti Bell  
August 2024**

**Introduction**

Mesa Verde National Park has over one hundred cataloged historic furniture pieces, most of which date to the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) period at Mesa Verde from 1933 to 1942. The earliest furniture pieces date to the 1920's. The park provided funding through the Mesa Verde Association for an inventory and a research study of the furniture. My work began on May 14, 2024, and ended on August 15, 2024. Sam Denman, museum technician, helped me with the inventory, and Ashley Baranyk, archives technician, helped with me with the database spreadsheet. Their assistance and familiarity with the park collections were invaluable to me. I consulted with several Mesa Verde former curators and employees, and with former park carpenters Merle Michael and Joie Shisler. Oral history tapes related to the historic furniture were very helpful, especially several interviews with Kenny Ross, a CCC enrollee who later became a park naturalist. Also helpful was an interview with Wilfred Michaels, nephew of park carpenter Alwin Molenoar, who made furniture and supervised CCC workers during that period.

My tasks were to:

- 1) Identify previous furniture surveys and studies (e.g. 2004 Conservator's assessment).
- 2) Research Accession 29, the park accession which contains most of the park's furniture.
- 3) Print the detailed description and current location of each cataloged item.
- 4) Identify other park documents which mention furniture (Superintendent Monthly reports, Naturalist reports, CCC records, historic photo files, and CCC photo binders).
- 5) Contact former park curators and other employees who have knowledge of the furniture and information about it.
- 6) Document each piece with photos of the item, its catalog number, and any special markings such as NPS numbers or dates.
- 7) Complete a report of the findings with an appendix of source materials and a spreadsheet of each item with information about each .

**Background information about furniture making**

Jesse L. Nusbaum, Mesa Verde's well-known superintendent who served three terms and was a trained archeologist, **first arrived on duty in May of 1921**. He knew right away that he wanted to establish park headquarters on Chapin Mesa and build his own residence there as opposed to living in Mancos where all former superintendents had lived and worked. Nusbaum was a builder and a manual arts instructor as well as a photographer and archeologist. During the winter of 1921-22, Jesse, his wife Aileen and stepson Deric, and one local workman, built the superintendent's residence of local stone and wood over a period of five months. Once the roof was in place they created a workshop inside and started making their own furniture. The living room served as their workshop until the house was complete enough to move in, which they did on March 14, 1922. They had been living in the seasonal ranger's old wood frame house .

Nusbaum's experience with furniture construction goes back to Las Vegas, New Mexico, 1907-1909, when he taught manual arts at New Mexico Highlands University. Later in 1917, he was

the construction supervisor for Santa Fe's new Museum of Fine Arts, and there he designed much of the interior woodwork as well as furniture (see article in [El Palacio, spring 2013](#)). His design ideas were inspired by his interest in the Spanish Franciscan Mission period and archeological work at Pecos pueblo. In their own furniture at the superintendent's residence, Jesse and Aileen added Pueblo and Navajo Indian decorative motifs, e.g. clouds, birds, lightning, and geometric designs to their Spanish Colonial style. Chip-carving was also done and color added to the chip depressions. Aileen, an artistic and creative person, helped with the carving, painting, and finishing work. She applied the shale finish which was often used. A historic photo (**Photo 1**) shows the interior of the residence with a large cabinet, an artistic wooden lamp, and chair. The large cabinet served as a case for phonograph records and a phonograph, and also as storage for photographic equipment and enlargements. The lightning zigzag pattern of the grilled doors was of Pueblo Indian origin.

Nusbaum described his Spanish Mission style furniture in a letter to National Park Service Director Stephen Mather in March of 1922:

*"The table is the width of the dining room window and from it, one looks directly into Spruce Tree House to the east. All carving, that is the gouge carving on the supports of the big cabinet and the chip carving on edges, is painted with two shades of Indian blue, the effect contrasted with the beautiful grey (silver) stain that we finally found in the form of decomposed shale from the Spruce Tree spring site, is most pleasing....The large library table built a long while ago, has the turned legs -- hand chiseled I should say as it is a tedious job -- and carried the same chip carving as on the large cabinet."*

Note: It is assumed that Nusbaum took all of his furniture with him when he moved to Santa Fe in 1930. A photo of the cabinet (**Photo 2**) appears in the book [New Mexican Furniture, 1600 to 1940](#), published in 1987. At that time it was owned by Rosemary Nusbaum, Jesse's second wife who lived in Santa Fe until her death in 1990. Nusbaum died in December of 1975.

### "Santa Fe style"

Santa Fe, New Mexico in the 1920's was one of the places in the U.S. where historic preservation and revival of traditional crafts, and antique collecting came together to create an atmosphere of cultural expression and preservation. As early as 1912 preservationists such as Edgar Hewitt, Sylvannus Morley, S. C. Cartwright, and others who were on the city planning board made recommendations to maintain Santa Fe's character as the most ancient city in America. Morley proposed a city ordinance that would require new construction to conform to a "Santa Fe style" (which he defined in the appendix to the document). The city did not take any official action at that time, but forty years later in 1957 a historic preservation ordinance was passed based on Morley's original recommendation. In 1916-1917 Nusbaum was construction supervisor for the new Museum of Fine Arts which was being built. Nusbaum, Kenneth Chapman, and Sam Huddleson worked on carving and designing the wooden beams and corbels for the museum and they also made furniture. Nusbaum was a designer as well as a builder. The furniture pieces for the Women's Board room were the first Spanish Colonial revival pieces made in New Mexico. The furniture and the roof beams had chip-carved motifs with color painted into the carved depressions (**Photos 3 and 4**). The inspiration for these motifs was from eighteenth-century Valdez wooden chests. The Art Museum, La Fonda hotel, and other new buildings became representative of the new-old Santa Fe architectural style. John Gaw Meem came to Santa Fe in



**Photo 1** Interior of the superintendent's residence, 1922 (photo from Aileen Finnan Luis album)



**Photo 2** Cabinet made by Jesse Nusbaum, from collection of Mrs. Rosemary Nusbaum (Plate 259, in New Mexican Furniture 1600 to 1940)



**Photo 3** Detail of interior woodwork designed by Jesse Nusbaum, 1917, Women's Board room, Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe



**Photo 4** Chest with chip-carving made by Jesse Nusbaum, 1917, Women's Board room, Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe

1920 and soon became the premier architect of many private homes and buildings in the new style (notes from New Mexican Furniture, 1600 to 1940).

Santa Fe style furnishings for homes and buildings often had an eclectic combination of Spanish Colonial revival furniture, Hispanic wood carvings, traditional tinwork, Pueblo Indian pottery, Navajo rugs and other American Indian artwork, and antiques. When Nusbaum and his wife furnished the superintendent's residence at Mesa Verde in this same style, tourists wanted to look inside the home because they had heard about the rustic and unique furnishings.

Assistant Superintendent Marsh Finnan and his wife also made furniture for their residence, one of the stone houses. When Finnan became park superintendent, he continued the park tradition of Spanish Colonial furniture in the headquarters' buildings. Paul Franke, a seasonal ranger in the 1920's who later became park naturalist, also made his own furniture. When he was the acting superintendent in 1935, he designed some pieces for the museum's new addition.

### **Superintendent Monthly reports in the 1920's**

The Superintendent Monthly report for March, 1926, written by Jesse Nusbaum, states, "During the month a carpenter and helper were employed in finishing up the necessary furniture for buildings used by the public..... the two men employed have been doing this kind of work for me – one for a year and one for three seasons – so they have thoroughly absorbed and are in sympathy with the type of furniture we are making."

"Following is a partial list of the more important pieces finished, all in early Franciscan style –  
6 arm chairs for administration and museum buildings  
6 large benches seating four comfortably for public rooms in ranger station and community house

1 large carved table for community house

2 clothes closets for two rooms at ranger station

1 large bookcase for ranger station

2 bedsteads to fit springs on hand for ranger station

all shelving and pyramids for eight big cases in museum "

**(Photos 5 and 6)**

Superintendent Monthly report by Nusbaum for Sept. to December, 1926: "The community house makes a fine addition to the public buildings on the park and is due to become one of the most popular buildings on the park. It commands as you know a superb view of Spruce Tree House ruin in the canyon below, with a spacious porch or balcony from which the visitors may view the ruin with comfort and relax after the trips to other ruins."

Note: the Community House was designed for visitors to use. Today the building is the Chief Ranger's Office (CRO).

Superintendent Monthly report for Feb. to March, 1927: ".....cleaning floors in our community house, with installation of the furniture so far complete."

Superintendent Monthly report for April, May, 1927: ".....the floors of the community house have been stained and oiled.....the fire place completed, the balance of the furniture made and installed."



**Photo 5** A large table similar to this one was made for the Community House in March, 1926



**Photo 6** The Community House had two corner benches; this may be one of them in the museum auditorium

### **Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) at Mesa Verde, 1933 to 1942**

In 1933 camp NP-2-C was established as a temporary camp in Prater Canyon but closed in 1934 when federal funding provided for two camps, NP-5-C and NP-6-C, to be constructed on Chapin Mesa in the fall of 1934. Camp NP-5-C continued until almost the end of 1942. Although a small operation among all the various CCC programs at Mesa Verde, furniture construction was one of the jobs which employed CCC enrollees. Jesse Nusbaum was back in the park as the superintendent from 1936 to 1939 during much of the CCC period. Nusbaum maintained his influence on the architectural and furnishings style of the park.

**Historian Duane Smith** wrote in his Mesa Verde Centennial book, New Deal Days: The CCC at Mesa Verde, pg. 51, that **Company 861 from camp NP-6-C had a wide range of projects, including furniture making.** Beginning in August of 1935 enrollees of Company 861 were building cabinets and in September they were building chairs with tanned leather seats. By the end of the year they had completed two cabinets and ten chairs. During the CCC period park carpenter Alwin Molenoar and CCC foreman George Bauer trained and supervised enrollees.

The park archives has a narrative report of the **Emergency Conservation Work (ECW) for Camp NP-6-C, Company 861**, dated April 1 to September 30, 1935, which lists and describes projects during that period, including wood working: Project 152, Seats, settees, etc. – the construction of six chairs and one cabinet for the museum; Project 153, Signs, markers and monuments – a total of 169 carved park signs were made for placement at various locations on roads, trails, and at buildings; Project 155, Table and bench combinations – tables and benches for the new public campground are being constructed; materials have been purchased for 85 tables, and 25 have been completed so far.

The Park Naturalist report, November 1935, gives the names of several enrollees on the ECW crew: "The Cabinet making crew consisting of enrollees Chester Patterson, Wolf, and Knox Patterson, moved their shop and machinery from the back room of the Community Building to the Reading room of the museum. Three days were spent in building a partition between the front room and the exhibit rooms and in making cabinets for their tools, setting up machinery, etc. They have completed the sales cabinet for the museum, and also have been tanning hides to be used as bottoms for new chairs that are to be constructed. The next project assigned to them, the construction of several small tables, is being held up because of lack of lumber."

**(Photos 7 and 8)**

The Park Naturalist report, December 1935, has a brief update about the addition to the park museum, "The new addition to the Museum is rapidly taking form, the west wall of the old loggia has been torn out and the porch extended on the west side of the building." The report mentions the furniture making crew: "Due to the illness of Chester Patterson, the main-stay of the Cabinet making crew, and also due to the several holidays in December, not as much was accomplished on their project as in November....."

The March 1936 Park Naturalist report mentions the carpenter shop again, "The carpenter shop which for some time has been in the museum library, has been moved to the community building. It now occupies the space formerly occupied by the Post Office, the latter having been



**Photo 7** Historic photo, "Working in the improvised carpenter shop in the museum, Jan. 1936" (MEVE71372\_171\_989)



**Photo 8** Historic photo of map cabinet and six new chairs, Sept. 1935; the chairs have cowhide seats (MEVE71372\_171\_943)



moved to the new Post Office building. The carpenter shop will have to remain in the community building until the new museum is completed."

The Park Naturalist report, June 1936, has good news: "On June 22 the Museum addition was accepted from the contractor and Mesa Verde National Park now has one of the finest museums in the Park Service.....all furniture and equipment that was stored in the Rangers Quarters and the Community Building has been moved into the Museum. Some has been put into use; the rest has been stored in the basement. All furniture was oiled and polished as it was put into use."

The Park Naturalist report, July 1936, names the CCC carpenter: "Mr. George Bauer, a CCC carpenter foreman, and four CCC enrollees are now doing carpenter work on the museum furniture project."

For September 1936 the Park Naturalist report describes new construction: "The carpenter force of one foreman and four enrollees has spent the month constructing display cases and furniture for the museum. Bases for the ten new display cases have been completed. The outside was given a shale finish; the inside a stippled ivory finish.....Construction of the book cases for the library is well under way. These cases will be four feet in height and will line two short walls of the library."

October 1936 Park Naturalist report describes: "The new bookcase for the library reading room has been completed and installed. Two new benches have been completed and installed. These benches were constructed of "c" select Ponderosa pine by ECW enrollees under the competent direction of Facilitating Foreman G. A. Bauer." (**Photos 9 and 10**)

November 1936 Park Naturalist report describes a large bookcase/cabinet which is still in the Chief of Interpretation office (formerly Park Naturalist office): "The large book case that was formerly in the library has been moved to the Park Naturalist's office. It was cut down somewhat to fit the east wall and now serves as a book case and as general storage space." (**Photos 11 and 12**)

December 1936 Park Naturalist report continues with the large cabinet: "The museum files have been given a complete work over and are now in perfect shape.....The filing cabinets were built into the large book case in the Park Naturalist's office and are now entirely inconspicuous but are readily available."

The Superintendent's Annual Report, 1937, mentions that "Thirty-one pieces of hand-made furniture of early Spanish Colonial design were manufactured for the Park Museum."

**Alwin Molenoar, park carpenter**  
**Kenneth Ross, CCC enrollee and park naturalist**  
**(Photos 13 and 14)**

According to his nephew Wilfred Michaels, Alwin Molenoar was park carpenter at Mesa Verde from the spring of 1927 until 1942. Known as "Pop" Molenoar, he was a hard-working, talented man who was a perfectionist at furniture making and other wood working projects. In 1981 Marilyn Colyer, park technician and a key figure in the park's oral history program, interviewed



**Photo 9** "The new book shelves in the museum library, October 22, 1936" (MEVE71372\_171\_1143)



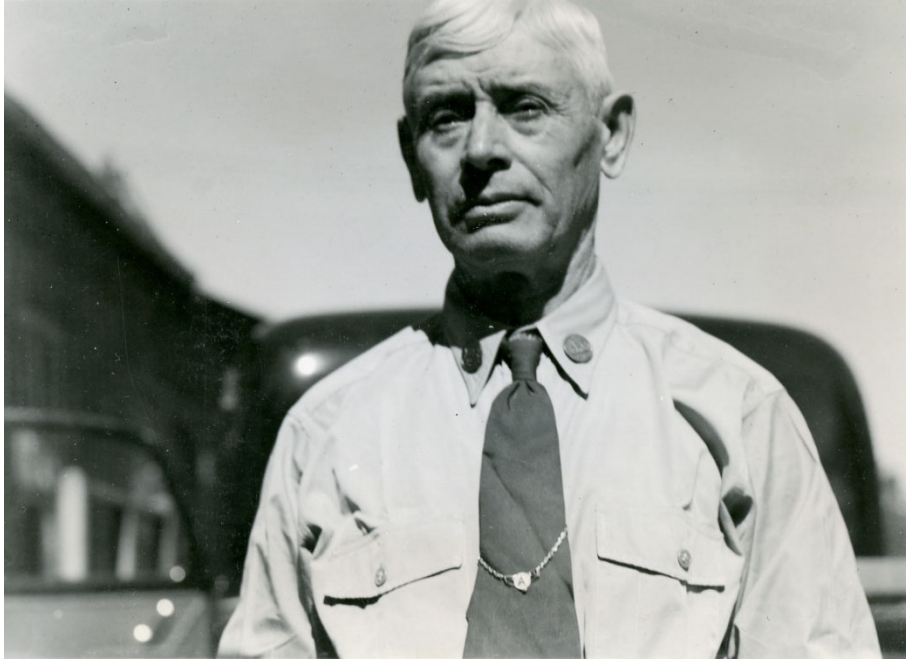
**Photo 10** "New benches for the museum, November 12, 1936" (MEVE71372\_171\_1151)



**Photo 11** Historic photo of interior of museum; Room A and reception, 1936 (MEVE1472\_620\_667)



**Photo 12** "The remodeled book case in the Park Naturalist's office, November 23, 1936" (MEVE71372\_171\_1159)



**Photo 13** Alwin Molenar, park carpenter, summer 1940 (MEVE1472\_250\_415)



**Photo 14** Kenneth Ross, park ranger, Nov. 1943 (MEVE1472\_250\_416)

Molenoar's nephew about his uncle and about the wood working tools he had inherited from Molenoar. The nephew knew about Molenoar's career at Mesa Verde. Marilyn concluded that most of the park furniture was made by Molenoar, but according to Kenneth Ross, a CCC enrollee and later a park naturalist, estimated that Molenoar built half of the furniture for the museum and about that much for the superintendent's house. Ross said in his 1981 oral history interview that Molenoar definitely built the heavier pieces that are in the museum, and he made benches of two or three types. "I think the last piece he made was the cabinet, the large cabinet that for years has set in the middle of the floor in the lobby, the large cabinet with a very large chrysanthemum – like carving, with bulged sides where the doors are, in the lower part of the cabinet.....it was built for display of publications." (from Ross transcription, pg. 72-73).

### **(Photo 15)**

Ross started his association with Mesa Verde as a CCC enrollee when he was age 23. Later he was hired as a seasonal ranger and naturalist. He remembered that plain chairs and more elaborate chairs were built in the park. Some were arm chairs with a regular board seat, while other chairs had cowhide seats (tanned hide). Both types were being built before the CCC and during the CCC period. Molenoar trained CCC boys who had an interest in furniture work; many chairs were made from 1935 to 1940 according to Ross. He called it a production line. Park carpenter Molenoar was especially busy during 1935 and 1936 when the new museum addition was being built. Along with making furniture, he designed and built doors, windows, shelving, and other wood features in the auditorium and other areas.

### **Furniture Construction**

Superintendent Nusbaum constructed his own furniture using the mortise and tenon technique of joinery common with the early Franciscan missions. Joints were made with wood, so no nails or screws were needed. The Spanish Colonial style furniture made during the CCC period generally used the same joinery technique, although table tops were often held in place with wood screws. Molenoar always selected his own lumber directly from the local lumber mills near Mancos. Yellow pine (Ponderosa pine) was the wood of choice, and it had to be knot-free. In the 1930's the pine trees were large so most all of the lumber was knot-free. Molenoar had several tool chests of different wood working tools (which his nephew Wilfred Michaels still has). Kenneth Ross, who knew Molenoar, described how the rippling effect on wood was done with a foot adze or with a hand adze. Ross remembered that Molenoar made his own hand adze by modifying two chisels, taking the corners off and making them slightly rounded. A hand adze was safer than a foot adze because a piece of wood was held with the foot while using the foot adze. The unique twisted legs on tables were of Franciscan mission origin and were made with hand tools. .

### **Finishing the furniture**

According to Molenoar's nephew, a brown commercial stain was often used on the furniture and then a paste wax (Johnson's wax) was applied. When asked about the use of Mancos shale as finish, the nephew said his uncle never mentioned that he used it. Kenneth Ross, however, was very familiar with the shale finish because he made it and experimented with it. Jesse Nusbaum and his wife Aileen finished their furniture with a finely made paste of some decomposed shale from the Spruce Tree House spring. Then, they waxed the natural stain to protect the finish. Kenneth Ross thought the idea came out of Santa Fe because the use of local materials was the only option when native peoples and the Spanish built their homes and furnishings.

Much of the park furniture may have had a natural shale finish but most pieces now have been painted over. The September 1936 Park Naturalist report mentions that a shale finish was used on the outside of newly constructed exhibit cabinets for the museum. Kenneth Ross knew about it and he describes the whole process of making a shale finish in his 1983 oral history interview (tape #8). According to Ross, not all of the Mancos shale has the right layer -- you have to look for a lens of sticky claylike shale and after collecting pieces of it, you pound it up and put it in a soaking tub. It's important to keep the tub full of water and always stir it down to the bottom because pieces can settle and harden. The shale eventually absorbs the water but it takes several weeks or even months to get good slurry. Crushing the shale is best, and then it doesn't have to soak so long. The end result should be a fine slurry or paste that can be applied by hand to the furniture piece. The fine slurry is rubbed into the grain of the wood and allowed to dry. Using a stiff brush, the grit is brushed off and then paste wax is applied to protect the finish. As a result, the color of the furniture is usually a soft blue grey or grey. **(Photo 16)**

### **Traditional designs**

In the Kenneth Ross interview he mentions a set of New Mexico vocational bulletins which have many design ideas in them (Spanish Colonial Furniture Bulletin, 1935). In Mesa Verde's book collection in the archives, there is a copy of the bulletin. The bulletin is actually six different bulletins from the New Mexico Department of Vocational Education which are grouped together and include topics such as Spanish Colonial furniture, Spanish Colonial painted chests, tin craft, and embroidery, among others. Ross remembers using the bulletins as a reference. Jesse Nusbaum utilized both Spanish Colonial and Pueblo Indian motifs when he first designed the furniture for the Fine Arts Museum in Santa Fe and for the White sisters' home in Santa Fe. In 1994 art historian Lonny Taylor wrote that "Nusbaum's genius as a designer lay in his ability to adapt architectural details to furniture forms without disturbing the proportions of the furniture" (pg. 4 in "Creating a Hispanic Artifact: The construction and furnishing of the Martha and Elizabeth White house in Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1923-1929"). Pueblo and Navajo Indian designs were used in some of the furniture making at Mesa Verde but Spanish Colonial and rustic styles predominated. During the CCC period at Bandelier National Monument, the CCC enrollees built furniture utilizing styles of Pueblo Indian and Hispanic designs but they were created by Park Service architect Lyle Bennett and other NPS personnel (see El Palacio, spring 2013 article). By this time the Spanish-Pueblo Revival style had become popular in many NPS southwestern parks and monuments.

### **Other Historic Furniture**

During the 1930's Mesa Verde had wicker-seat chairs and rockers which were probably ordered from the Old Hickory Furniture Company, a manufacturer that provided chairs for national parks as early as 1898 (Accession 29 folder). Kenneth Ross remembered the chairs and had a rocking chair of that type on the porch of his house. In his oral history interview from 1981 (tape #4), he thought they were made of hickory and might have come from Arkansas or Tennessee. He said many of those chairs were "scattered around" the park. In 1976 museum technician Marilyn Colyer mistakenly cataloged the chairs as "oak" because she thought they were made locally by the CCC enrollees. The Mesa Verde collections repository has nearly 20 cataloged chairs of this type. They all have wicker seats and backs. **(Photo 17)**

The park concessionaire The Mesa Verde Company had furniture for its dining room in the old Spruce Tree Lodge in the headquarters area. According to an oral history interview with Bill and Merrie Winkler in 2004, the dining room furniture was hand-made in the mid-1930's when the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad ran the concession. Later, in 1937 Ansel Hall bought the concession and decided to change the color of the furniture from brown to multi-colors with each table and chair set a different color, i.e. red, yellow, green, and blue, etc. The furniture was made of special cut, thick boards of sugar pine and shipped in. The dimension of the lumber was very unusual and was probably a special order. Gus Foch, a German immigrant who lived in Mancos, was the primary carpenter who worked on the furniture. It was simply constructed and relatively heavy. Bill Winkler said the furniture was not used after Spruce Tree Lodge was dismantled and new facilities were built at Far View. Some of the pieces were saved and used by the Park Service in the Rec. Hall. **(Photo 18)**

### **Park Furniture cataloged in 1976, then deaccessioned in 1977**

The majority of the park furniture was cataloged by museum technician Marilyn Colyer in the spring of 1976. Ron Switzer was superintendent at that time. The very next year in 1977, the same catalog records say, "Reviewed for historical significance and removed from the collection for lack of significance, August 1977." Evidently Supt. Switzer didn't want all of the furniture cataloged (see Switzer memo, Accession 29). Then, when Allen Bohnert became curator at Mesa Verde in November, 1979, many of the furniture pieces were returned to the collections. Most catalog records then say "returned to collection by curator Allen Bohnert, December 1980."

Bohnert was curator from 1979 to 1987, working under Superintendent Bob Heyder who replaced Switzer in June, 1979. Allen Bohnert entered duty on November 4, 1979. He had a graduate degree in science and museum studies, and prior experience in museum work. When he first arrived to the Mesa Verde collections area in the old Wetherill Lab, he was appalled to see only a chicken wire cage for security around the boxed and shelved artifacts and sunlight coming in through the skylights and windows. He took steps right away to get funds to upgrade the storage facility and funds for backlog cataloging (see Allen Bohnert oral history interview 2008). Bohnert became concerned about the CCC era furniture being "lost" if it was deaccessioned. At that time NPS was encouraging preservation of structures and artifacts of the CCC period, so he thought the furniture should go back into the collections to be reassessed. In fact, a formal deaccession had not been officially done by the park, so he put everything back into the park's collections in December, 1980.

### **Meeting with Kenneth Ross**

Bohnert got interested in researching the CCC era furniture and the light fixtures. He cataloged many of the old light fixtures so they could be kept for use on historic buildings. He researched the use of a shale finish used on the CCC furniture. In May of 1983 Kenneth Ross was tape recorded again (tapes #7, 8, 9) by Allen Bohnert, Marilyn Colyer, and geologist Mary Griffiths. They wanted to know about his memories of park furniture construction and the use of a shale finish. Ross was age 83 at the time. During the interview Bohnert asked Ross about certain cataloged pieces and what he knew about them. Ross remembered many pieces of furniture, even his old desk which had been made by Molenoar. He also contributed information and stories about Jesse Nusbaum since he knew the superintendent. After the interview, they went on a field trip in the park to find Mancos shale along road cuts. Samples were taken and Bohnert wrote



**Photo 15** Display case with glass top and rosette design made by Alwin Molenar, in today's museum



**Photo 16** Close-up view of the color of a natural shale finish





**Photo 17** Manufactured wicker seat chair, probably from Old Hickory Furniture Company, purchased in the 1930's



**Photo 18** Concessionaire chairs made by carpenter Gus Foch for the Spruce Tree Lodge in the 1930's

down the exact locations of the samples (now in the park collections). Later, curator Bohnert experimented with using the shale finish. He wrote a short report about using shale finish on the bookstore shelves in the museum , April 1985 (see report in Accession 29 folder).

### **Conservation Study of the furniture, 2003-2004**

Liz Bauer became Mesa Verde's curator in January 1988 after Allen Bohnert left his position in the summer of 1987 to become Regional curator in Denver. Liz was curator in 2003 when a Save America's Treasures (SAT) grant was awarded for a conservation assessment of CCC furniture at Mesa Verde and 12 other national parks. Conservator Mary Frederickson visited Mesa Verde in November, 2003 and had time to assess 147 objects, most of which were furniture. Each object was given a priority number that indicated the urgency of the recommended treatment. In her 2004 report she noted that most of the objects are cataloged so they have curatorial oversight and documentation can be maintained. Many of the outdoor furniture pieces have been painted and/or reinforced over their lifetime. No outdoor pieces were found to have original finish, but she did find several indoor pieces with evidence of original paint and finish. The report says that Mesa Verde has many one-of-a-kind pieces. Most all of the pieces needed some type of conservation attention. At the end of the report she offers treatment options and highly recommended training and workshops for staff and volunteers.

Liz Bauer retired as curator at the end of 2006, and Carolyn Landes became park curator in the new year, 2007. As a follow up to recommendations in Mary Frederickson's Conservation Study, Landis applied for conservation funds through PMIS, calling the project "Preserve Mesa Verde's Historic CCC Furniture." It is not clear whether funds became available or not through that request. In 2008 there was funding for Deb Huck to work on the gray-painted CCC benches in the museum. Curator Landes and Deb consulted with Larry Bowers at Harper's Ferry Center about the choice of finishing after the old paint had been removed. Amber shellac was recommended as "one of the tried and true finishes in use for the last 200 years," and it can be removed if necessary with denatured alcohol (see information in conservation files). Deb's work is documented in FMSS records.

### **Merle Michael replica furniture and cabinetry**

In 2008 carpenter Merle Michael made a beautiful reception desk cabinet for the museum with CCC period designs and craftsmanship. He used a chrysanthemum (rosette) design which was similar to Molenoar's large cabinet in the museum. Merle and his assistant Joie Shishler had become interested in the CCC furniture in the park and the CCC history in general. During that period Larry Wiese was superintendent and encouraged Merle to work on furniture projects as well as new signs for headquarters buildings and the park entrance. The work had a CCC-era look. He built a big CCC style cabinet for the mail room in the administration building, and made smaller furniture pieces that had chip-carving designs with color. Curator Landes planned to document the pieces made by Merle Michael so there would be a record of his furniture in contrast to the historic CCC. This documentation is still in progress.

### **Historic Furniture --some interesting pieces**

The following are furniture pieces to highlight because they are one-of-a-kind or have an interesting history and/or unique marks:

**Photo 19** shows the former library (now the museum bookstore) with a large table and two benches without arms, July 1941.

**Photo 20** shows possibly the exact same furniture in today's superintendent's residence.

**Photo 21** shows a bench without arms (Cat#10605) in today's superintendent's residence.

**Photo 22** shows "NPS-1" written under the seat with a blue carpenter's crayon.

**Photo 23** shows another bench without arms (Cat#10572).

**Photo 24** shows "NPS-2" written under the seat with a blue carpenter's crayon.

**Photo 25** shows the large cabinet (Cat#10565) described in the 1936 Park Naturalist report. It had been in the museum library but was cut down in size to fit the east wall of the Park Naturalist's office. Today it is in the same office in the museum, now an Interpretation office.

**Photo 26** shows a one-of-a-kind cabinet (Cat#10690) in the conference room of today's old Ranger dorm; the cabinet was formerly in the lumber shed office in Maintenance.

**Photo 27** shows a large table (Cat#10705) in the conference room of today's old Ranger dorm. According to conservator Mary Frederickson, it is the only table in the furniture collection which appears to have original turquoise paint.

**Photo 28** shows a historic photo of a publications sales case in the museum, 1932.

**Photo 29** shows the same corner cabinet (Cat#10662) in today's superintendent's residence.

**Photo 30** shows a cabinet (Cat#10551) in the mailroom of today's Administration building. The catalog number and the name "Nusbaum" are stamped into the wood.

**Photo 31** shows "Nusbaum" stamped on the right side post.

### **Historic dates**

Six pieces of furniture have dates under the seat of each piece. Two chairs in the superintendent's residence have "3-30-27" in blue crayon under their seats, and a similar chair (Cat#10656) in the repository has "March 30, 1927" written out with a carpenter's blue crayon. In the cultural resources library there is a bench (**Photo 32**) with "March 25, 1926" written under the seat. On the porch of the Administration building an old bench (Cat. #10657) has a date "4-8-26" under the seat. And, in the collections repository a small table (Cat. #10573) has the date "4-18-27" under the table top (**Photos 33 and 34**).



**Photo 19** Historic photo of former library room (now museum bookstore) with large table and two benches, July 1941 (MEVE71372\_143\_1607)



**Photo 20** Likely the same furniture in today's superintendent residence, a large table and two benches without arms



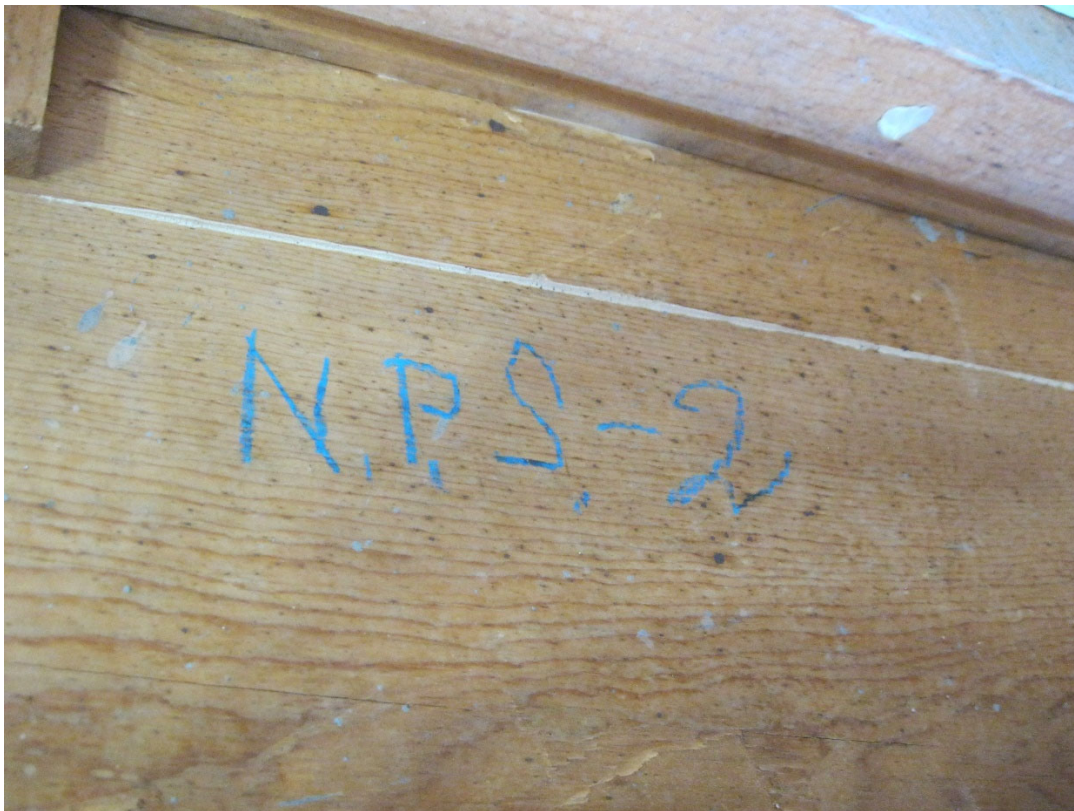
**Photo 21** Bench without arms (Cat#10605) in today's superintendent's residence



**Photo 22** Under seat "NPS-1" written with blue carpenter's crayon



**Photo 23** Bench without arms (Cat#10572) in today's superintendent's residence



**Photo 24** Under seat "NPS-2" written with blue carpenter's crayon



**Photo 25** A large cabinet (Cat.#10565) described in 1936 Park Naturalist report which had been in the library and was cut down in size to fit east wall of the Park Naturalist office in the museum. It remains in the same room but now is Interpretation.



**Photo 26** A one-of-a-kind cabinet (Cat#10690) in conference room of old Ranger dorm today; it was formerly in the lumber shed office in Maintenance



**Photo 27** A large table (Cat#10705) in conference room of old Ranger dorm today; according to conservator Mary Frederickson, it is the only table in the park collections which appears to have original turquoise paint



**Photo 28** Historic photo of publications sales case in museum, 1932 (MEVE71372\_143\_20)

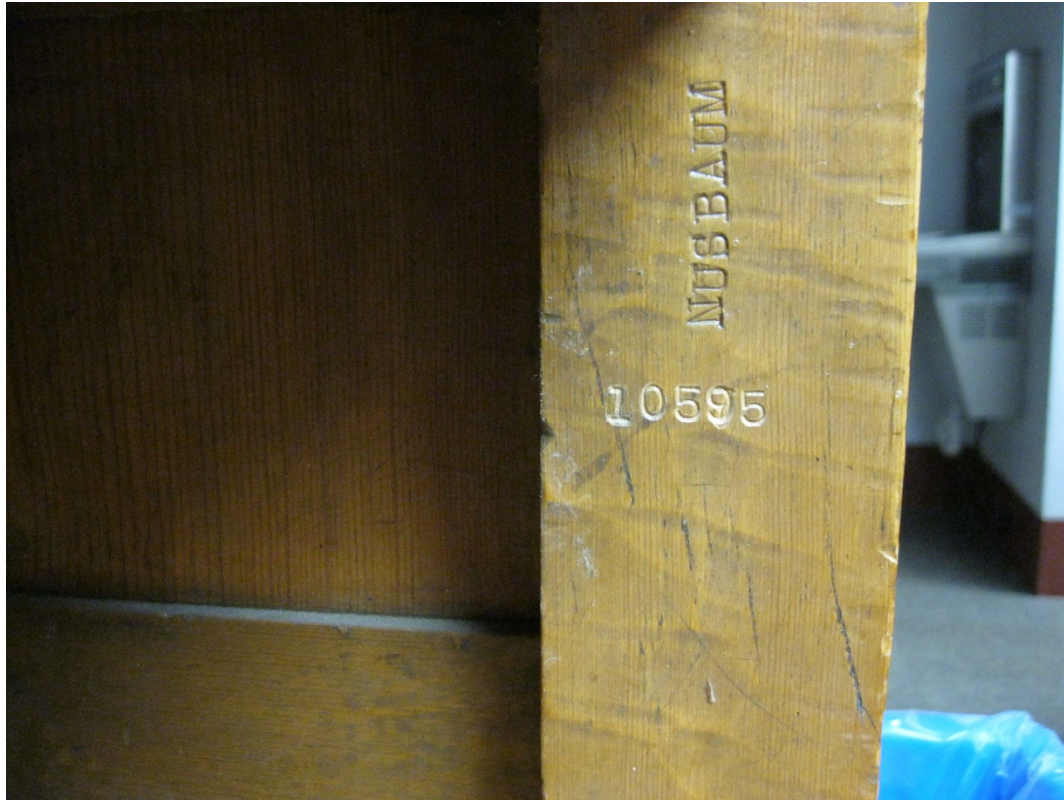




**Photo 29** Corner cabinet (Cat#10662) in superintendent's residence today



**Photo 30** The cabinet (Cat#10551) in the mailroom of the Administration building today, stamped with catalog number and "Nusbaum"



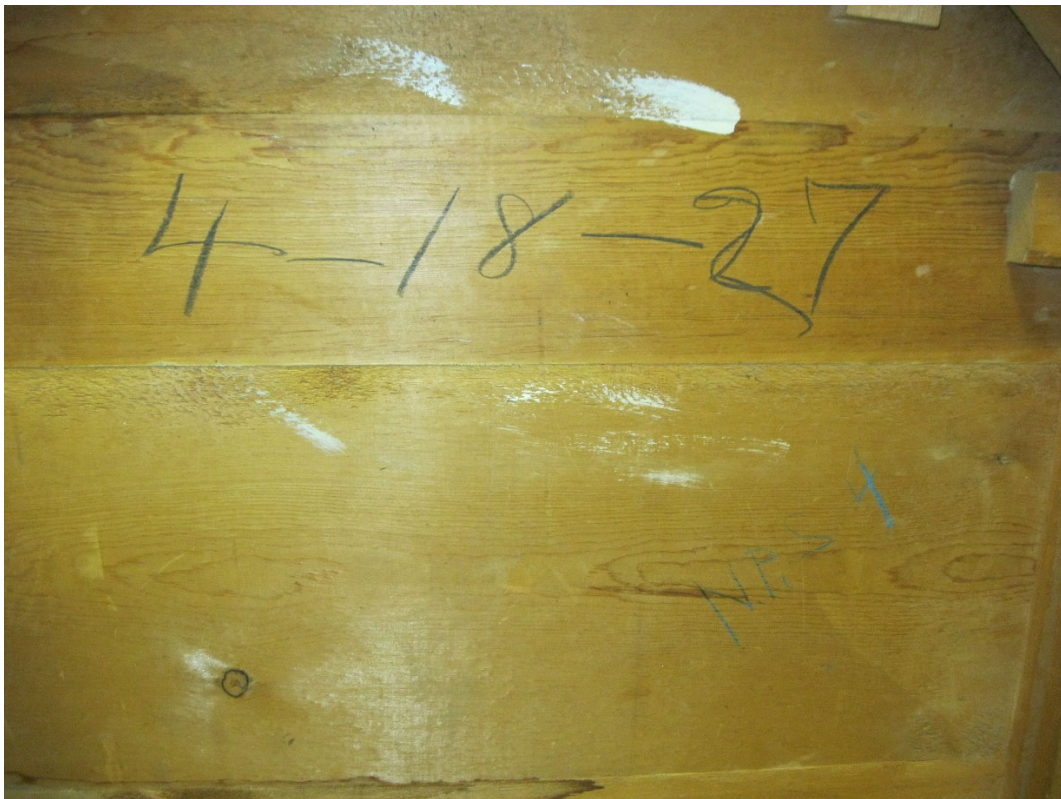
**Photo 31** "Nusbaum" on the right side post



**Photo 32** Bench (Cat #10580) in cultural resources library with "March 25, 1926" under the seat



**Photo 33** Small table (Cat#10573) in collections repository with date under table top



**Photo 34** Date "4-18-27" written in black crayon under table top

**Excel spreadsheet as database for this study**

The current research has led to a more complete history of the park's earliest furniture, including 1920's –era pieces and CCC-era pieces. Nearly 100 items of historic furniture were photographed and documented during the project. An Excel spreadsheet with descriptions and photos of each item has been created as a result of this project. The spreadsheet is a separate document which is available to curatorial staff.

**Appendix** has two scanned articles from El Palacio, spring 2013 issue

**References in the text:**

"Creating a Hispanic Artifact: The Construction and Furnishing of the Martha and Elizabeth White House in Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1923-1929," by Lonny Taylor, 1994, reading copy, School of Advanced Research, Santa Fe

New Mexican Furniture, 1600 to 1940 by Lonny Taylor and Dessa Bokides, 1987, Museum of New Mexico Press

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