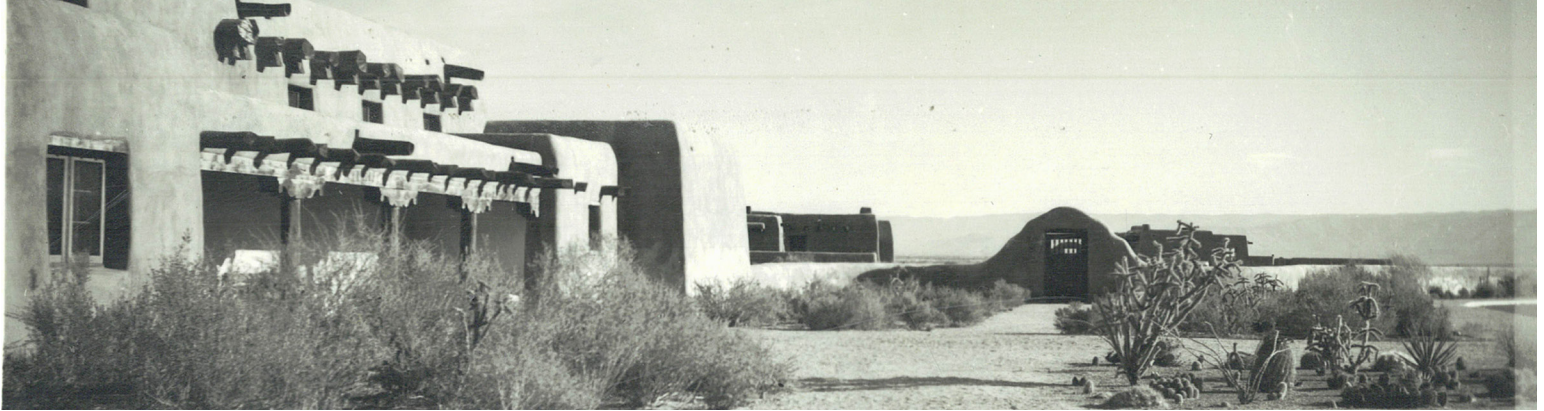




The White Sands Historical District



Think back to your visits to different National Park Service (NPS) sites. Is there is usually a natural attraction that beckons visitors to explore and hike through acres of wilderness? More than likely, “yes!” However many other sites preserve historic buildings, structures, and other artifacts. White Sands National Monument is one of the NPS sites that protects a little bit of both. So, as you voyage through the gypsum dunes, take some time to admire the beautiful historic building that houses the visitor center.

Using the Antiquities Act of 1906, President Herbert Hoover designated Alamogordo’s gypsum dunefield as White Sands National Monument in 1933 during the Great Depression. The new incoming president Franklin Delano Roosevelt, took office in the midst of one of the worst economic downturns in American history. To combat the joblessness and revive the American economy, he created the New Deal program. The New Deal program provided skilled and unskilled laborers with jobs, one of which was to create what is now the historic district of White Sands National Monument.

The administration and outlying buildings were designed by NPS architect Lyle E. Bennet, with the help of Robert W. Albers, under the direction of Deputy Chief Architect W.G. Carnes of the Western Division of the Branch and Plans in San Francisco. Construction of

the historic district took place from 1936–40 under the purview of New Deal agencies such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

The workers molded bricks, adzed wooden beams, and hammered and punched tin sheets to create a structure in the Pueblo Revival Style, with traces of Mission style accents. The visitor center at White Sands was created in the Pueblo–Revival style which is characterized by the use of adobe bricks, resulting in a low, flat horizontal form with contoured edges, covered by a viga-latilla roof structure.

Adobe is one of the oldest building materials known to man. Adobe bricks are created by using a mixture of clay content, straw, sand, water, and sometimes manure. Roughly three parts clay, seven parts sand, and one part straw. The amount of water varies, but the consistency should be similar to bread dough.

The ingredients are mixed and then placed in a mold and shaped. The mold is then removed and the bricks are baked in the sun. The large poles which rest on the corbels and extend to the outside of the building are called vigas. The pine vigas are topped with a series of smaller logs called latillas which are sometimes topped with split wood coverings called cedros or tablas. The beams and other wooden elements were hand adzed. An adze is a small ax like tool with a curved blade which sits at a right angle.



Old Fee Station