

Hubbell Trading Post: Trade, Tourism, and the Navajo Southwest.* Erica Cottam. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015. 368 pp.

Reviewed by Louise Stiver

In 1878, Juan Lorenzo (J.L.) Hubbell began a small but growing family mercantile business that grew into a trading empire in the American Southwest. In *Hubbell Trading Post: Trade, Tourism, and the Navajo Southwest*, author Erica Cottam ambitiously weaves an eloquent narrative that chronicles the history of the Hubbell Trading Post from its inception to 1967.

The seeds for this book were drawn from the author's previous work, which entailed writing a historic resource study about the Post for the National Park Service. The book is a more ambitious undertaking. It incorporates numerous primary sources and direct quotations from knowledgeable individuals to bring to life interactions at the Hubbell trading posts. Cottam divides the book into nine chapters that chronicle J.L. Hubbell's early attempts to establish trade in Navajo country; the rise of his trading empire, tourism, and the curio trade; his infamous hospitality; the company's decline and bankruptcy; and the creation of the Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site.

The first chapter summarizes Hubbell's early ventures into Indian country at a time when American, Spanish, and Native American lifestyles were intersecting and changing. He learned the languages of recently subdued native tribes, entered the trade business, and helped usher the Diné into the new era of reservation life. Throughout the book, Cottam references J.L. Hubbell's Spanish roots, which were crucial to the way he built his ranching, farming, and trading enterprises on and near the Hopi and Navajo reservations.

J.L. Hubbell came from generations of Spanish landowners and traders who built their fortunes from land, livestock, and trade along the Camino Real trail as far south as Mexico City. His American father, James Hubbell, was from a family of traders. He arrived in New Mexico in the 1830s and married into the Gutierrez family in Parajito, New Mexico, after the Mexican-American War, when large swaths of the Southwest became part of the United States. Hubbell grew up when the family's strong Spanish traditions began to blend with American lifestyles. For centuries the family shared close ties to other wealthy, landed Spanish families that employed and supported each other in business ventures. Founded in the seventeenth century, Pajarito was the Hubbell-Gutierrez company town with wealthy families in big homes and servants and peons in small dwellings nearby. They relied on workers to run their estate and support their businesses, and in turn, the workers relied heavily on the family for their survival. Generally owners benefited most from this exchange but ultimately they were connected by a shared dependence. J.L. Hubbell would have grown up among the privileged yet he worked alongside those who were less fortunate, including Native American servants who were considered part of his family.

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The family's fortunes waned when grasslands could no longer support large livestock herds and land holdings were sold to pay American taxes. Hubbell and his siblings adapted to the changing environment by finding new ventures. J.L. Hubbell set out to seek his fortunes shortly after the Diné returned to their homeland in 1868, after suffering confinement at Bosque Redondo, New Mexico.

The book recounts the fascinating development, rise and fall of J.L. Hubbell's trading empire that perpetuated family traditions of kinship, hospitality, and land ownership. The author draws parallels between the nation's political and economic successes and woes to those encountered on the reservation. She highlights Hubbell and his family members' relationships with native customers, workers, and the surrounding communities. Cottam balances observations depicted by community members, some of whom felt the trader benefitted at their expense while others were thankful to have supplies nearby, a place to barter goods, and possible employment. It took time for traders to learn the native languages and develop relationships among native populations. Because the Hubbell family had grown up learning a number of languages in order to barter or give guidance to workers, it was perhaps an easier transition for them to negotiate among strangers and build upon their growing success.

Within reservation boundaries, traders leased the land for their operations. In spite of this, Hubbell succeeded in developing the original post in Ganado into a large ranch, irrigated farm, trading post, family compound, and accommodations for overnight guests. He also established an ongoing contract for a postal service and continued the bartering system that had been employed by his ancestors for generations. He traded canned food, flour, fabric, hardware, and other goods needed by the Navajo in exchange for livestock, sheep hides, handwoven rugs, and silver jewelry.

The remoteness of Hubbell's posts created dependence between both trader and customer. Unpredictable weather and eroded grasslands affected both trader and seller alike as did reservation-wide livestock reduction programs required to restore vegetation. While customers often needed goods on a routine basis, the resources they used for exchange were seasonal. A system emerged where customers could buy goods on credit until they could reimburse the trader. Keeping accounts and asking for payment was a complicated and often frustrating undertaking for Hubbell and he often extended loans to his Navajo neighbors beyond what he could bear himself.

Hubbell provided accommodations to Diné who traveled from afar and his hospitality, extended to all visitors who traveled to his far-flung posts, became legendary. He provided lodging and extravagant feasts for many renowned political figures, including Theodore Roosevelt, artists E.A. Burbank and Maynard Dixon, anthropologists, philosophers, scientists, and writers such as Charles Lummis. Cottam highlights guests' correspondence about their reservation travels, citing that the hospitality given by Hubbell was often a life-changing experience. His home became a gateway to touring Navajo and Hopi country, prompting his son Roman to later operate a tour company.

Trading partners and paid employees were part of the Hubbell mix. But from the 1880s to Hubbell's death in 1930, he relied heavily on his siblings, children, and grandchildren to actively participate in the family business. As he expanded his operations, he assigned them to posts or engaged them as accountants, buyers, and managers. He also relied on family to keep operations going while he pursued an active political career or spent extended periods establishing other enterprises. During economic downturns, he borrowed heavily to keep his operations afloat.

The importance of family members is a repeating theme throughout the book and his enterprises could not have survived without them. The same could be said of his forefathers, who relied on extended family to grow and sustain family enterprises. J.L. Hubbell's heirs sustained the trading empire for several decades after his death in spite of the devastating effects of the Great Depression and World War II. Unfortunately, it was not enough to avert bankruptcy or to transition the homestead to other, more modern endeavors. Ultimately, the surviving family members lost everything but the original Hubbell Trading Post. Surviving heirs, including Dorothy and Roman Hubbell, lobbied governmental organizations to preserve the Hubbell Trading Post as a living legacy. Dorothy was the last family member to keep the post open and the homestead intact. Finally, in 1967 Hubbell Trading Post opened as a National Historic Site.

Erica Cottam's book thoroughly documents the endeavors of a pivotal Navajo reservation trader and his trading empire. Juan Lorenzo Hubbell was a larger-than-life figure who stood at the intersection of a new era between Spanish, American, and Native American relations in the American Southwest. He was able to navigate between cultures and eventually thrive in an unfamiliar place surrounded by native residents. *Hubbell Trading Post: Trade, Tourism, and the Navajo Southwest* is an engaging and well-researched publication that chronicles an important era in Navajo trading post history.

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