

The Building Blocks of Mesa:

Three Structures that Shaped our City

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Mesa has hundreds of monuments, buildings and places that reflect its heart and history. There are many locations that show Mesa's beautiful culture, but today I'll focus on just three structures that were/are very important to our city and, in my opinion, super cool. These special places are the Mesa Canal, the Post, and the F.P. Neilson and Sons Tower.

Have you ever gone jogging by the Canal and wondered how it got there and why it matters? If you have, this section will give you answers! When settlers first arrived in the valley they saw vast acres of fertile farm land with just one thing missing....water. Long ago, an ancient tribe called the Hohokam had noticed this too and built many canals to bring water to their crops. The settlers found these ancient channels and decided to use them as the foundation for *their* irrigation system. In February of 1878 construction began. The pioneers cleaned out, extended, and rebuilt these ancient systems, and diverted the Colorado, Verde, and Salt Rivers so that the water would flow to their crops. The newly completed, *huge* Arizona Canal System brought water to farms all over what would now be known as the East Valley, *especially* Mesa, bringing new life to a dry land. More people began to flock to Mesa, drawn by the promise of good farming. Then the canal was upgraded even further when the Cross Cut Hydro Generating Facility was built in 1914. Now Mesa had farms, water *and* electricity! As Mesa continued to grow, and the demand for electricity was higher, additional power generating plants were built, giving more electricity to the city. Now you can see this canal is more than a fun place to walk. It is the lifeblood of Mesa!

Downtown Mesa is full of vibrant history, but one of the most famous monuments is called the Post. In 1936 it was built as a post office, upgrading communication for the citizens of Mesa. However, Mesa soon outgrew that little post office so it was expanded in 1960 to try and keep up with the growing economy. By 1980 the post office outgrew it completely and it was repurposed as a federal building. For decades it housed organizations that helped our entire country and state, not just Mesa. In 2002, these services moved out and the ownership of the building transferred back to the city of Mesa, where it waited for a renovation plan to be approved. In 2018 it received funding and construction began, with many historic elements from the building's time as a federal building being incorporated into the design (This makes it a *very* fun place to visit!). Thanks to that renovation the structure became the vibrant place we know and love today, with event spaces and city offices. It is amazing how one building can represent decades of culture and history!

Picture yourself standing by the railroad tracks near Broadway Road and MacDonald. You are gazing at the magnificent tower that looms before you, gray and defiant to the effects of time. You are looking at the F. P. Neilson and Sons Tower (I know, it's a boring name, but it is still really cool!), an abandoned grain elevator (Yes, a grain elevator. What did you think it would

be, Rapunzel's tower?). It might not seem important, but in its day it supported Mesa's farming industry, and now it serves as a 'monument to another time'. But I'm getting ahead of myself, so let's start at the beginning. Frihoff Peter Neilson built this structure in 1938, when the farming community was thriving, but not able to process all of its crops. This tower definitely solved *that* problem! For decades, trains would stop on the nearby tracks to be loaded with grains from the silo. The more trains that came, the more Mesa prospered. Then, in 1969, the Neilsons sold their tower before it finally closed in 1975. Now it stands lonely, a remnant of a bygone era. This tower represents Mesa's history as a farming community, and I hope it can stand for a long time to come!

There are many places in Mesa that made it the way it is today, but I chose these three because they are places that I have grown up around that piqued my interest. But these buildings are more than intriguing specks on a map. They are the building blocks of Mesa's past and present!

Sources

Websites/Pages

- Mesa Historic District History
- SRP
- Salt River Stories: Putting Water to Work
- Downtown Mesa
- Mesa Convention Center

Books

- Mesa Past and Present By: Shannon Maki and Susan Ricci