

Following the Spanish re-occupation of New Mexico in 1692, some Pueblo Indians, principally from Jemez Pueblo, fled into Old Navaho-land. During the recent archaeological excavations in this area, evidence came to light of the close proximity of these Pueblo groups to those of the Navaho. During the ensuing century pottery fragments from Navaho sites indicate definite Pueblo influence, as remnants containing red, black and occasionally white designs on pottery had been fired to the high temperature used by the Pueblo People.

Later came utilitarian pieces, some of good size, with thin <sup>walls</sup> ~~walls~~ made of crumbly clay with sand for temper. Shaped with the use of corncob scrapers, many had exceptionally beautiful form. These storage jars had pointed bottoms, being held upright by the use of basket rings or set in depressions in the floor. Water bottles were also made of pottery with narrow openings with handles on the sides through which horsehair ropes were inserted. These were flattened on one side for ease in carrying, and some had designs. Legend tells of water bottles being made of the four colors, white, blue, yellow and black for carrying water for ceremonial purposes, gathered from the four sacred mountains. These water bottles are very rare now, for they were replaced by other types of containers as soon as they became available. Bowls of various shapes and sizes, spoons and dippers and dolls, many with finely executed designs were the products of years gone by.

To-day, only cooking jars and drums are made, and there seem to be but a few potters left. These jars, somewhat similar in shape, rounded on the bottom and with a slight flare at the top, some with scalloped edges, are all that can be found of recent manufacture. These pots are made for cooking, for preparing dyes for wool, and some made specially for remedial and ceremonial use. Some of the latter



latter are used as drums with pieces of sheep skin or goatskin stretched over the tops. A new pot is always preferred for a drum and once it has been used for this purpose, it must never again be used for cooking.

In some areas firing is accomplished by digging a pit, building in it a large fire of pinon wood. When this has burned down, the coals are raked to one side, the pots put in usually up side down, then covered with the hot coals and left for from four to seven hours. In other areas, pots are placed on flat stones, then covered with enough juniper (preferably) to insure the fire burning for six hours without replenishing. A few areas have used Spanish or Mexican type <sup>out door</sup> bake ovens. After a good fire has burned down, the pots are placed in the oven and left for twelve hours. Pottery making among the Navaho in recent years has never approached the superlative quality of that produced by the Pueblo craftsmen. Probably the Navaho have had less use for pottery, for as they became stockmen often moving from place to place, pottery was too easily broken, and too difficult to transport.

Following many inquiries in numerous regions, I finally heard of one potter in the Shonto area. With an English speaking interpreter, we set off to find her. After looking at my pictures and learning what I wanted to do, she asked us to return in two days and she would be ready. As there are a number of taboos connected with pottery making, I was not at all sure what I would be able to accomplish. For instance, no one must watch the gathering and grinding of potsherds (from ancient pueblo sites) which the Navaho potters use for temper to mix with their clay. This had been all prepared and mixed with the clay when we arrived, but our potter did leave the metate (grinding stone) and a few sherds for us to see. May Adson, our potter, was



sitting beneath a shelter as we drove up and greeted us with the usual courtesy. We watched her make four pots, using much the same technique as that of the Pueblo potters, using a water worn stone for smoothing the inside and a peice of corncob as a scraper on the outside.

Before May fired these pots, we had lunch. We had also been watching a daughter prepare the meal which consisted of roasted corn on the cob, boiled mutton, coffee and fry bread, a dough patted into a round flat cake and fried in deep fat. We produced some fresh fruit from our larder and as we ate we listened to much Navaho conversation. Finally after a few silent moments our interpreter turned to me and said, "You two look kind of old, but you sure got good teeth"!

Lunch over and everything put away, our hostess built up the fire and placed the pots near it. This was in no sense true firing. She turned the pots occasionally to heat them evenly all around.; these were baked rather than fired. Two of the pots we purchased to bring home, but we were sure that because we had witnessed as well as photographed their making, they would never be used, and would be destroyed after we had gone. However, we had had a nice day and had witnessed at least a part of the Navaho process.

When we were packed and ready to leave, May shyly said to us- "We have a new baby in the hogan". Though I had noticed another woman going in and out of the hogan several times during the day, she did not join us nor speak to us. We were taken into the hogan where we found a tiny baby less than twenty four hours old. It was in a small cradle board, sound asleep. Soon the father would make a new permanent cradle board for the addition to the family. We parted good friends and went on our way for we had located a basket maker not too many miles away, whom we were to visit the following day.



While the art of basket making is a minor craft among the Navaho, it is practised with great skill by the few women who still make them. From the time of the return from exile, three types of baskets were made, but in recent years two of these are no longer found, the water bottle and the carrying basket. The water bottle had a long neck and a round base, measuring from twelve to sixteen inches in diameter. It was coated both inside and out with pitch or resin to make it water tight. The carrying basket was a wicker, loosely woven basket with an unfinished edge, used for gathering yucca or cactus fruit or other edible plants. As other types of containers came into the trading posts, these two types quickly disappeared.

From 1868 to the early years of the twentieth century, shallow baskets were made for utilitarian purposes, to eat from, and for holding small objects. Archaeological evidence indicates that graves did contain baskets, though in recent times, they are never buried dead.

During the past fifty years or more, baskets are made exclusively for ceremonial use. They are shallow, perhaps three to four inches deep and twelve to sixteen or eighteen inches wide. The material used is chiefly Sumac, sewn with fine split strips of yucca leaves. The use of a fine bone awl is used to insert the yucca binding strips. The Sumac twigs, or small branches, are scraped clean and sorted as to size; pieces to be dyed are laid to one side, others will remain the natural color. The same dyes as those used for wool are prepared for the dying of both Sumac and Yucca. Usually only red, indigo and black are used, occasionally yellow.

RED is made from the roots of juniper and mountain mahogany boiled together, then ground, and alder bark is added to the mixture.

BLUE is made from the same indigo dye as prepared for dying wool.



A native blue is also used, by <sup>ing</sup> ~~using~~ a mixture of a blueish clay and ochre, pulverised and <sup>moistened</sup> ~~mixed~~ with water.

BLACK is obtained from coal added to boiling sumac leaves, or from a sulphurous rock, slightly roasted with pinon gum or resin.

Added to boiling sumac, this gives a rich, lusterous black.

The basket maker begins by winding a sumac twig around a small stick known as the bottom of the basket. In order that it will be pliable, all material is soaked before using. Sewing is done counter clockwise, with the exception of one rare ceremonial basket which is made clockwise and must be completed in one day. So deft and strong is the sewing that a basket will require only a few minutes soaking to make it water tight.

DESIGNS are limited to geometrical shapes, tiered block designs, sometimes used in a single row, sometimes double with the second inverted. Sometimes a single open unit is used, sometimes bands with no geometric forms. Always there is the "trail" or "path of exit", the "spirit path" a narrow strip where the design does not quite meet, for the Navaho believe that to complete the circle would imprison the spirit of the maker. This is also true of the Pueblo pottery, ~~makers~~ for a similar trail will be found on all decorated pottery. When a basket is nearly complete, the rim is finished in a herring bone, or false braid, technique. The final end of the rim is always directly above the spirit path. In ceremonies where a basket is full, the medicine man knows where the spirit path is by finding the end of the rim, and the basket is placed so that the spirit path always faces the east.

There are numerous ritual uses of baskets. They are used as drums by turning them up side down and beating with small drum stocks.



They are used to contain ritual paraphernalia such as prayer sticks, medicine bags, fetishes, and other articles. They are used as containers for ritual baths. They are used as food containers in certain ceremonials. They are used for the corn meal porridge in wedding ceremonies, which has given them the name of wedding baskets. They are used as portions of masks in certain nine night ceremonials. They are used in minor rituals in the home. They are used to contain the sacred corn pollen.

There are many strict taboos in connection with basket making as with all the other crafts. In silver smithing, the craftsman must not make certain pieces of jewelry while his wife is pregnant or some disaster will occur. While a woman is making a basket she must not be touched by anyone. No one may step over the materials being used to make a basket, otherwise the material will break. Should a man make a basket, he will become impotent. Blood must never touch a ceremonial basket. Should this taboo be broken, harm will come not only to the maker, but also to the singer who used it.

Other crafts pursued by the Navaho are many kinds of leather work, both decorated and plain. Saddles, shoes and moccasins, pouches, straps and belts, hobbles,, quirts and ropes. In early times the Navaho became good tanners for they made shields and spears, quivers for their arrows, leather caplike helmets. To whatever craft the Navaho turns tal~~X~~ents, he will execute it with skill and dexterity.