

1st draft

When the Navaho returned from Fort Sumner to that portion of their old land allotted them by the Treaty 1868, trading posts were soon to play a vital role in their lives. By the early 1870s Mormon traders were coming down from Utah establishing contacts for trade at the San Juan and Colorado Rivers. John D. Lee initiated a ferry, crossing the Colorado not many miles above the Grand Canyon. Long in use, this ferry, bearing his name, was not abandoned until the building of the Navaho Bridge in 19 , linking the Navaho Country with that of North-Central Arizona and Southern Utah. Licensed by the Government Agent at Fort Defiance, traders began to appear as the Navaho produced wool and blankets. Few in number at the beginning, traders increased in proportion to the volume of Navaho production. Strict regulations were imposed by the Government when licenses were issued, and with but few exceptions, the trader has never owned his land.

The pioneer trader was a rugged individual, able to survive in remote areas under primitive conditions. He had to build what he needed, to learn the Navaho language, to stock his store and to become a shrewd business man in order to exist. There are many legendary personalities among these first traders to the Navaho: Keams, the Hubbells, the Wetherills, Sam Day; later McSparron, Coolidge, the Newcombs, and others whose names are synonymous with the posts they located. As the Navaho in past years seldom had cash with which to make his purchases, a credit system was devised whereby a Navaho could place certain items of his possession, chiefly his jewelry, in pawn until that time of year when wool or sheep were sold.

Built of stone, adobe bricks, occasionally of logs, the old trading

posts consisted of one or more buildings with sheep and horse corrals and watering tanks nearby. In addition to the store, there was usually a barn, a storehouse, sometimes a visitor's hogan for the use of Indians who lived far away. Many of the old posts had only one big room with a dirt floor. Around three walls were shelves reaching to the ceiling, stocked with goods of all descriptions. In front of the shelves and separated from them by a passageway, were high, wide counters built for protection as well as use. Beneath the counters were shelves for an assortment of articles, tools and a weapon or two in case of need. In the center of the room, or to one side, a large ~~old~~ fashioned iron stove gave warmth in winter, and there were benches along the remaining wall. Hanging from the ceiling were coils of rope, lanterns, buckets, bridles, harness and other items of trade.

Each trading post was and still is a center, like the hub of a wheel, the outer circumference being perhaps twenty or more miles away. To these posts the Navaho have been coming to trade for nearly ninety years, bringing their produce to exchange for goods they desire or need. They bring wool at shearing time, sheep at fall roundup time, hides, pinon nuts, handicrafts of blankets, rugs, and silver jewelry. The trading post became a place of meeting, the place for gathering and dispensing news, the local post office, a place to obtain water, for all posts had to be built where there were natural springs or good wells. The trading post is where government notices are posted, where officials come to set dates for spring branding and dipping of sheep, for farm demonstrations. It has also been a place from which to obtain help in time of need, for many a trader has traveled miles in good weather or bad, by day or night, to take sick Navaho People to the nearest hospital. ~~The~~

The trader has had to build what he needed; he has had to be able to fix anything and everything, and through the years has taught many Navaho necessary construction and mechanical techniques. By and large, the trader has been the best friend the Navaho have had over a long period of time. The trader has been the connecting link between the U.S. Government and the Navaho People, for every trader had of necessity to learn to speak Navaho. It has been the trader who has interpreted Government regulations and who has made contacts between Government agents and the individual Navaho of his region. And it has been the trader who established outside markets for rugs and jewelry. There have been a few exceptions of exploitation and unfairness in trade, but such traders soon disappeared for the shrewd Navaho quickly detected such practises and simply went elsewhere to trade.

Each trader is licensed by the Indian Bureau under strict rules of trade. He does not own the land on which he has built his post, with the exception of a few who had established their posts before their locality was included in the reservation. For eighty years most trading posts were in isolated spots, far removed from worldly contact. There were few roads, usually bad roads, often impossible at certain times of year. Horse or mule drawn wagons were the only means of carrying supplies or delivering goods for sale. When it became possible to use trucks, the traders were the first to do so. During the past thirty years, road improvement has progressed with increasing rapidity until today, new paved roads link the major sections of the reservation. Distances seem to have shrunk as trucks today travel one hundred miles in two hours, where not long ago, they took two days or more to make the same trip.

experience. People will come in to the post and sit for a long time on the benches considering what to buy. One will finally go up to the counter, and pointing to an article, put down the money for that one item. Following another considered time this will be repeated. Sometimes individuals will stay at the post all day before the final lot of merchandise has been purchased. They observe everything, listen to all conversations, deliberating. When they go home they will remember overthing that has transpired. Always there is purchase of tobacco (in olden times loose tobacco used to be free)- the purchase of candy for children, of pop as the business of the day proceeds.

In every post there is a special place, often a whole room, where pawned jewelry is kept. Items are ticketed with the owner's name, the date, and the amount owed. Jewelry is kept for as long a period as three years for the owner to redeem it. Then it may be placed on a case as "dead Pawn" for sale to any who will buy. The traders are very fair about this transaction. I recall an instance when I had been requested to buy some dead pawn for a shop in Colorado Springs. One piece was a particularly fine concho belt. It had been dead pawn for two years. Six weeks after I had bought it, the original owner had ridden over fifty miles to redeem his belt. He was crestfallen to find it gone. The trader took the time and trouble to write to ask if it had been sold and asking me to return it if possible. We returned it, for it was still in the shop, and the original owner redeemed his prized possession.

Probably the most famous trading post on the reservation is the Hubbell Post at Ganado, Arizona. This is one of the exceptions where the land was homesteaded by the original Don Lorenzo Hubbell in 1876. Don Lorenzo, the son of a Connecticut Yankee and a Spanish mother,

purchased a store built six years previously. This may have been the very first post on the reservation. When Don Lorenzo bought the post, he also homesteaded a one hundred and sixty acre tract of land. He erected a number of fine substantial buildings during the course of his life. His post became a Mecca for anthropologists, archaeologists, writers, and a host of noted visitors, who were all received with the gracious hospitality of a Spanish Don. His family still maintains the post. Here is Don Lorenzo's treasure room, with his grandson, Roman Hubbell discussing the merits of a rug just brought in to be sold. Here on the walls are many relics of the past, Kit Carson's gun scabbard, a fine old gun collection, water containers of many different types, a superb collection of Indian baskets from many tribes, archaeological specimens from a nearby early Pueblo ruin. Piled high along ^a ~~the~~ wall of the room were stacks of Navaho rugs all of top quality for which the Hubbell Post was noted. The Hubbells, Cozy McSparron, and later the Lippincots at Wide Ruins, did much to restore the use of native dyes in rug making. This is one of many instances where the traders' influence has counted most, and to-day certain areas of the reservation are noted for rugs of widely different types. Other traders of note whose interests lay beyond the trading counter, were John Wetherill at Kayenta, Sam Day, the Newcomb brothers, at Nava and Crystal, Bruce Bernard at Shiprock, to name but a few. Mr. Bernard had one of the finest pawn rooms on the reservation and an excellent system for recording the pawn. The room was a spectacle of turquoise, coral and silver. The wives of these traders played an equally important role in their respective areas, teaching many useful household arts, aiding many families, learning much of Navaho ways. The hey day of these posts is gone now, and modernization is fast taking over, though there are still a

few smaller posts in remote areas which still have some of the flavor of the early years. It will not be many years before these too are changed and with their passing will go one of the most colorful phases of western history, one so closely bound to Navaho, the Pueblo, the Apache and other tribes who first inhabited this western land.