

# The History of Cowboys & Indians

## (Holbrook - Hopi - Navajo Nation - Winslow)

The Navajo people of today are believed to be descendants of a group of Athabaskans who ventured to the southwest from Canada around 1400 A.D. Prior to the Navajo, the first known occupants of Navajoland were the Ancient Ones, sometime referred to as Anasazi. Centuries old remains of homes are still encountered in many areas, such as in Canyon de Chelly National Monument, Navajo National Monument, Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park and Chaco Culture National Historical Park.

The first white men to come into Arizona were trappers, beginning as early as 1820. The California Gold Rush in 1849 brought a multitude of settlers, invading the land of the Navajo. Homes were built, land was farmed, and livestock grazed on the ranges. The whites took this land as their own, regardless of the indigenous people who had arrived long before them. If the Navajos got in the way of this "progress", they were pushed out, often shot. The Indians fought back and wars began, resulting in the establishment of forts set up by troops sent to protect the settlers.

Kit Carson established operations in Ft. Defiance, Arizona in 1850. The troops and settlers needed supplies. Mercantile establishments began to appear. Freighters, wagon trains, mail carriers, stagecoaches – all were moving across the land on a dirt road that would eventually become Route 66 and then Interstate 40.

Patience began to wear thin between the whites and the Navajos. By 1863, Kit Carson was ordered to launch a last campaign against

the tribe. He established a supply camp near present-day Holbrook, but decided that Ft. Defiance better served his purpose. The plan was to remove all Navajos from their homeland. He destroyed crops, killed livestock, and polluted water. Eventually, Carson rounded them up at Canyon de Chelly and sent them on a "long walk" to Fort Sumner in eastern New Mexico. It was during this time that the federal government decided the tribes needed to be separated from each other and reservations were established. The Navajos endured four years of hardship in an internment camp until the Treaty of 1868, when they were allowed to return to their beloved country. Thousands had perished, but with great determination and endurance, the Navajos survived and re-established themselves so successfully that they are now the largest Indian tribe in the United States.

Hopi, located today in the midst of the Navajo Reservation, also endured many hardships. The arrival of the first Europeans, Spanish explorers and the impositions of Americanism via the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs presented the greatest challenges to Hopi religion and culture. Despite the many centuries of such documented challenges, Hopis continue to thrive as the religion, culture and language remain intact. Today, Hopi's survival is evident in the village of Walpi, where the native culture is closely guarded and outsiders are forbidden from using cameras or tape recorders. Atop First Mesa, many Hopis sell their pottery, paintings and katsina dolls from their doorsteps, carrying on a tradition of producing world renowned fine art.

Trading posts began springing up throughout the Hopi and Navajo reservations and surrounding areas. Navajos were mainly leading a pastoral life, raising sheep and harvesting the wool. Their products became very desirable and thus sustained their economy – they had grown dependent on the goods available from the traders and, therefore, dependent on the necessity of cash. Traders exported their wool to eastern mills.

While Navajos were re-establishing themselves, the white men were having growing pains of their own. While several settlements had been temporarily established in what is now the Holbrook area, Holbrook itself didn't become a reality until the coming of the railroad in 1881. Up to this time, all settlements in the area had been established by Mormons. Holbrook was the only town that permitted gambling and saloons. This led to a very colorful era in Holbrook history. During the 1880s and 1890s, Holbrook seemed to be vying with Tombstone as the toughest town in the west.

During one year, it is recorded that 26 men were killed by gunfire. This was a huge percentage of a town with less than a total population of 300! Shooting brawls were common. Drunken cowboys regularly rode through town shooting up everything in sight. Holbrook had several saloons, but the most famous was the Bucket of Blood Saloon, where gunslingers were known to hang out. It is said that almost two dozen killings occurred in the place before law and order came to town. On one such occasion, when a gunfight resulted in the deaths of two men, someone commented there must have been a bucket of blood on the floor. Henceforth the name - Bucket of Blood Saloon. The building still stands today, just a few yards from the train tracks.

With the coming of the railroad, Holbrook became the business hub of the area, serving

cattlemen, sheep men, freighters, soldiers and more gamblers and outlaws. While lawlessness was going on in town, the surrounding areas were also being plagued by cattle rustlers. The Hashknife outfit was the largest cattle company and regularly employed outlaws who had been run out of other towns. They took whatever measures were necessary to protect their cattle from rustlers.

At the same time, the West was becoming more civilized, thanks in large part to hotel tycoon Fred Harvey. It was Harvey's elegant hotels and diners – which all ran along the Santa Fe Railway – that introduced linen, silverware, china, crystal and impeccable service to travelers and settlers of the West. His signature hotel was built in Winslow and named La Posada (“the resting place” in Spanish). At a total land, building and furnishing cost of nearly \$2 million, the hotel was the finest in the West when it was completed in 1929. Today, it still stands proud and is in full operation.

The railroad didn't always bring such success to an area. While tracks were still being laid in the late 1800s just west of Winslow, there was a miscalculation in supplies needed for a bridge. For one year, an instant town sprang up at the end of the tracks. People and supplies came as far as the tracks would take them and from there they would be freighted to their destinations – or forced to wait until the bridge was completed. The short-lived town of Canyon Diablo enjoyed a wild and wooly history, with a lawlessness that rivals Holbrook. The town disappeared as quickly as it appeared once the track was complete. In 1901 the land where the town had once been was annexed by the Navajo Nation and became part of the reservation.

The railroad also had its affect on the Navajo. It had reached the fringes of Navajo country by 1881 and by 1883, over one million pounds of wool was purchased by trad-

ers, along with hundreds of thousands of sheep pelts and goat hides. Navajo arts and crafts, including Navajo blankets, were gaining in popularity as tourism and interest in American Indians grew throughout the white-American society. For the most part, Navajos were enjoying a flourishing economy.

Minerals were discovered under what were considered to be Navajo wastelands. In order for the Anglo-Americans to lease the land for mining, the federal government decided that a Navajo government was necessary. The first council met in 1921, but dealt with little more than leasing matters. Rather than give each tribal member a portion of the leasing fees for mining, it was decided that the money would be put into a general fund for the common good. Unlike some other tribes, Navajo individuals did not then, nor do they now, receive royalty payments.

By the turn of the century, agents began to warn the land was being over-grazed. In 1930, it was determined that livestock reduction was necessary and a grand slaughter ensued. Navajos consider this period almost as devastating as the Long Walk. People who identified so strongly with their flocks – sheep were used for wool, food and for sale – were suddenly bereft of the source of their very existence. The economy collapsed.

In 1938 the Navajo people held their first election for a central government, electing 78 council members. At first, they met in Ft. Defiance, but soon the headquarters was moved to Window Rock where a large hogan-shaped building was erected to house them.

During World War II, there was resurgence in the economy due to a renewed demand for wool, along with employment opportunities in the U.S. armed services and in urban factories. The U.S. Marine Corps made great use of many Navajos by putting them into radio communications. They created an absolutely unbreakable code. The Navajo Code Talkers were credited with having a major influence on the outcome of the war.

The relationship between the Navajo Nation and surrounding communities has evolved from raids and murders to one of dependence on one another. We recognize the importance of working together and realize that in order to tell the whole story, it is necessary to tell the story from more than one perspective. This is an exciting, almost unexplored frontier. As we learn more about our mutual past, we go on with our future, and thus, the story continues...

**DISCOVER  
NAVAJO**